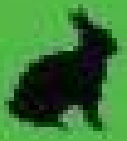
HOW TO PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY AND SURVIVAL

BOOK 1

LIVING OFF THE LAND



How to Prepare for Emergency and Survival
Book 1 Living off the Land

By LSG
Edited by Chris Breen

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Introduction

The Ludlow Survivors Group was formed in 2005 and came about after I was given the first DVD set of "SURVIVORS" which was a BBC television series first shown in 1975 about the aftermath of a global pandemic that had killed over 99% of the population.

From this I started to visit the official web site at www.survivorstvseries.co.uk

Through this I joined Bob Meades forum pages and became a regular contributor to the various discussions that unfolded.

Some of the topics on the forum led to discussions about "what if" a similar event should occur to modern society. Because of this it was thought that it would be better to set up a new forum.

Hence, Ludlow Survivors Group was born; it started in a small way and just got bigger and bigger. The original forum was soon too small to deal with all the topics and had to grow…

The original group consisted of just five members; myself, English Herts, British Red, David C and Pioneer, at the end of 2006 it had a total membership in excess of eighty people from around the globe.

Forum topics are wide and varied and there are close to ten thousand posts at this time. So much information has accumulated over the period that the forum has been running that one of the members gathered all the information and this book was created giving information about what we feel would be useful following a breakdown in society.

I would like to give my thanks to all who have contributed articles to the E-book and special thanks to Chris Breen for all his efforts editing it. Last but by no means least all the members of the forum, just for being there.

Dave D

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Chapter 1 Growing Food

Forest Gardening. What is it?

By Springer

I see the whole plan as food provision insurance. It doesn't look unnatural or out of place, so would be an unlikely target for scavengers, and if it was targeted, only whatever is ripe can be taken, planned correctly there should always be something ripe available to eat all year round, so scavengers could only ever take a small portion of the total yield, and if nothing untoward happens you can supply a large portion of a families dietary needs with minimal effort.

A food forest takes it's design from Nature. Each time you walk through a woodland, look at it with a veg gardeners eye, imagine for a moment that all the plants are edible, each one could be a crop.

You don't see anyone fertilising the woodland, leaves fall, annuals die back leaving organic matter, millions of soil organisms, birds, and Nitrogen fixing plants fertilise it all naturally. You don't see anyone watering the plants, a heavy layer of organic matter, with some shading from the trees, helps keep moisture locked in. You don't need anyone to come along and plant new crops each year, you don't need to cultivate either you don't see much bare soil in woodland at all. Cultivation actually wrecks soil structure, organic matter is blown away with a good portion of the soil, around 3 tons of soil per acre is lost due to wind/rain erosion. If soil is cultivated, the need for fertiliser increases, and the need to water crops increases, so why bother!

You don't see anyone needing to spray pesticides or weed killers, the natural diversity brings resilience, predators and pests are confused by the diversity. Think of a mono crop, say a field full of strawberries, and imagine you are a strawberry loving insect you just won the lottery in that field! Now imagine a few strawberry plants spread out amongst hundreds of other plants bushes and trees where strawberry loving insect predators make their home, chances are your days as a strawberry loving insect are numbered! You don't see weeds growing rampant, natural mulching prevents many seeds germinating.

A forest garden has many layers.

1.The top canopy layer is formed by the big trees, these could be maiden fruit trees, apples (on rigorous root stock), pears, mulberry or nut trees. Sweet chestnut could form a staple crop, hazel etc. If you have enough

room maybe allow a few full size N. fixing trees like Alder grow to full canopy height too.

2.Lower tree layer. Fruit trees on dwarfing rootstock

3.A Shrub layer, soft fruits, gooseberries, currents etc. getting a range of sizes and shapes in the shrub layer is mostly a matter of choosing a range of different shrub fruits. I also included N fixing trees which are coppiced to provide mulch for the fruit trees, and Nitrogen building in the soil.
4.Herbaceous/Vegetable Layer. Perennials mean less work! How strictly the forest garden is kept to perennials is up to the individual gardener. There is really no reason why annual veg and flowers can be grown between the developing trees and shrubs, though once the trees are mature there would not be the root space or the light for them. Perennials mean the soil is not disturbed, and they propagate themselves with little help from us. Self seeders, all we have to do is allow some plants to go to seed and make sure there is some bare soil surface nearby for the seeds to germinate in. Comfrey with it's long roots drag up deep minerals which can be supplied to fruit trees as mulch, it also makes a very good liquid compost.

5.Root zone. Root veggies, parsnips, spuds etc.

6.Soil surface, ground covering plants like strawberries or N. fixing self seeders like clover.

7.Vines & Climbers - might be best placed on walls and fences until the trees grow full size or else they may rob light from, or strangle the developing tree.

Woodland gardening is about maximising yield whilst minimising maintenance and labour. Each individual plant may not have a maximum yield compared to an example grown in the open as it is partially shaded by higher layers, but as a whole the space yield is maximised as the plants are stacked with many layers taking much more advantage of the space an individual might occupy alone.

On a new site, it's recommended to spend the first year observing. Note the arc and angle of the Sun, in winter and summer, prevailing winds, any frost pockets, existing plants e.g. nettles indicate fertile soil. Water flow, poor drainage, possible warmth from S facing walls, shade from adjacent trees/buildings etc. Note things you may want to keep, like existing trees, or even nice view too if you want to keep it!

Do a simple soil structure test, dig a few test holes, it is worthwhile knowing whether you have heavy clay, silt, loam, or sandy soil when it comes to plant choices, especially for rootstock choice, e.g. the less fertile the soil, the smaller the tree will be, so the choice of rootstock must always be balanced with soil fertility. If you are planting fruit trees on an infertile soil you will need to use more vigorous rootstocks to get the required size of tree than you would on fertile soil. Indeed the more dwarfing rootstocks will only do well on good soils and should not be used on infertile soils.

The ideal soil for most kinds of fruit is deep well-drained loam, slightly acid at about pH 6.5-6.7. But fruit can be grown on a wide range of soils, the degree that as soil differs from the ideal the trees will be less vigorous. E.g. an apple tree will grow less vigorously in either a heavy clay or light sand than in medium loam. Climate also has an effect, cool or wet conditions reduce the vigour of a tree, and a more vigorous rootstock is needed to compensate. My soil goes from heavy clay to a silty clay so I have chosen MM106 rootstock for my apples, and St Julian for the Prunus.

I found it worthwhile to draw a scale plan of the area first, including trees in situ that are staying, contours, permanent paths and hedge boundary's. This is not too difficult, I used A3 paper, measured the area in Meters and drew the plan at 4mm to the M.

Once you have a plan drawn, you will have a good idea how many canopy trees you want. Some trees will mature at a huge size (in say 20 yrs) e.g. Sweet Chestnut can have a canopy 10M dia, as can Pear trees, so a little research on mature sizes is worthwhile.

Tree choice can be bewildering! I got a price list from a reputable well stocked supplier and went through it marking every plant I wanted on a spreadsheet with the price. It worked out to double my initial £500 budget! So I whittled the list down from there until it was within budget. I then looked up each plant and made a note of mature size and put that on the spreadsheet too. I ended up with two size figures, height and spread.

It is worth mentioning Allelopathy at this point, not all plant interactions are good e.g. N. fixing. Some trees/plants put out toxic chemicals which kill or hinder other plants. Walnut is a good example of a tree with negative allelopathy, nothing much else will grow near a Walnut. I have included only one in my scheme, there was a handy spot on the Northern most edge where there was only room for one big tree.

I moved the tallest trees to the top of my list, set my compass to the

radius of the spread figures, and started drawing circles to scale(4mm per M) starting at the Northern most space on my plan so the tallest trees don't shade others. I finished the plan and then realised I'd not really left enough room to access the trees with ladders for cropping! I found it easier to add 1M (4mm on plan) to each radius of tree, and draw circles at that scale next to each other, so I know I will have some minimal space between trees at maturity.

I took my plan into the field, with a long tape measure, I measured the spot for each tree and then used bamboo canes to mark each tree position, marked up numbered cards and put one on its corresponding cane. This was really useful to visualise what the space would look like planted up. A good tip is to use an indelible marker, all my numbers washed off in the rain, I spent another hour on planting day re-doing the numbers!

Here is a pic of my plan, The pic is almost N facing, the green line on the left is old overgrow hedge, hawthorn, elder, elm, blackthorn, etc. which boarders the field. next to that is a public footpath, then the next green line is a hawthorn/blackthorn/hazel hedge we planted two years ago which is still only just establishing. The big green double blob at the N end is a very big twin trunk Ash, and top right is overgrown crack willows. The two biggest circles at the top are sweet chestnuts, with pear and a maiden sized apple, the big circle in the middle nearby is mulberry, the circles to the East are low growing Myrcia Gale and other spreading bushes of the Mahonia family.

The plan didn't change much on the ground, some plants were moved up contour replacing a few that had sold out before I got my order in. At first I was disappointed not to get all the plants on my original list, but in a way it turned out better as now I have some spaces I can fill with new trees that take my fancy in future.

Next one is an overhead of the N. end of the field which should give a better idea, you can see the lines of the vegetation changes, which shows where the wet bit is in the middle of the field (future pond/bog garden) and the line of drier land next to the river where the Ash & Hazel coppice plants are planted.

Question: The type of plants that we use as food are not the type of plants

that grow in a wood, they grow in open fields. Would they get enough light and enough water this way?

Lots of native plants, if we go back far enough in evolution, were originally to be found in woodland. Some may have evolved in open ground, on the coasts, or woodland edges, glades etc. Light levels are often important for flowering and seeding, but many plants will grow bigger leaves in response to lower light, forestalling flowering all together waiting for a natural gap in the canopy (an excellent example of this was after the storms in the 80's, I walked through the Grisdale Forest in the Lake District, wherever all the trees had blown over, there were thousands of Lupins, some locals reckoned they had not seen flowering lupins for 80 odd years!).

In a forest garden the canopy can be controlled by pruning to a degree, and the types of trees we choose are often quite open canopy trees which allow sufficient light levels through, there are of course exceptions, the chestnuts, walnut etc. can block out most of the light so are probably better suited to the bigger designs, but apples, pears, plumbs etc. can have quite an open canopy structure.

There are ways to design in full sun areas, utilising woodland edge - increasing woodland edge by planning "keyhole" paths (like a cul-de-sac) effectively creating a glade where you could have permanent raised beds, or plant directly in the "edge". Woodland edge areas, where herbaceous vegetation merges through shrubs into trees, are the most diverse and the most productive of food in both natural woods and forest gardens. This productivity is in part due to the favourable micro-climates created by the diversity of structure. The nearby trees and shrubs can make a sun trap for the herbs in the unshaded areas, buffer them against extremes of temp, regulate humidity, and protect them from wind. The leaves from the trees contributes soil fertility of the nearby open ground, we need to think in terms of the herbaceous edge being as much a part of the woodland as a part of open country. So we design the forest garden not only as a part of the garden where layers are stacked on top of each other, but also including some edge areas and glades where the Sun reaches right down to the herb layer.

Another element is succession. When the trees are first planted, it will be many years before the canopy closes completely. It is possible to make the most of changing light levels (over longer time frames) and maintain a high diversity of plants throughout the succession. A mixture of light-demanding, and shade tolerant vegetables can be planted. Not many of the shade-tolerant ones actually need shade in order to grow well, most can be planted in full Sun as long as they're kept reasonably moist, but as the level of shade increases they will tend to do better than the those requiring more light, which can be progressively weeded out as they weaken.

Water demand can be reduced by firstly having a good soil structure with plenty of organic matter, and then a thick mulch covering all open soil/ground.

Nitrogen Fixing plants, and other minimal maintenance nutrient sources.

Nitrogen Fixing plants have a symbiotic relationship with bacteria that live on the roots, most have on the roots where the bacteria make their home. The bacteria have the ability to take N. from the air and incorporate it in their bodies. Legumes (like peas & beans) are probably the most well known, though not all Legume species fix N. (the honey locust is a legume that doesn't) you can tell if the plants are fixing N. by digging up a small part of the roots where you'll see these little white/pink nodules on the roots.

There is a wide variety of N. fixing plants, Deciduous trees like Alder, shrubs like Gorse, and Elaeagnus species which also have edible fruit, herbaceous legumes like Clover or Alfalfa usually found in the green manure section of seed catalogues. I am making use of Lupin, both as a N. fix plant, ground cover to deter weeds, mulch supply when cut, and as a crop for chicken feed.

Trees and shrubs are the first option, though probably best for big forest gardens where there is plenty of space, and the fruit trees are mainly longer lived trees on vigorous root stock. N. fixing trees and shrubs can be planted in the gaps between the young fruit trees, coppiced for a few years, then removed as the fruit trees grow and take up the available space and light. In the first few years the N. fixers will contribute Nitrogen from leaf fall. As their roots grow and intermingle with those of the edible plants there will be some N. supplied directly from the nodules, but this will only become substantial once coppicing starts. As the trees are coppiced, the roots die back, leaving the N. directly available to other plant roots.

In a smaller food forest, with trees on dwarfing rootstock planted closer together, there may not be room for legume trees between the young fruit trees. The difference between the young tree at planting time, and their mature size is less, so the gaps between them are smaller. In a small garden there is also the incentive to make all plants food plants, it may be more worthwhile to plant short lived food plants in any temporary gaps between the trees than to plant N. fixing plants.

Much the same can be done with Herbaceous legumes. They can be planted as part of the initial vegetable layer, and allowed to die back as shade levels increase. They must be cut regularly in the early years or they

may crowd out other herbaceous plants.

Both these options yield more N. in the early years than later on. As leafy vegetables need more N. than fruits, this fits well with a succession in which the vegetable layer gives way to shrubs and trees as the shade level increases. Young trees need a good supply of N. for growth, but too much can inhibit fruiting (don't let your pets pee on fruit trees!)

Another method is to grow herbaceous legumes in a fertility patch. A separate bed of mulching crops and dynamic accumulators.

Dynamic Accumulators

Most soils contain enough plant nutrients, apart from Nitrogen, to grow heavy crops, but the nutrients are held in forms which are relatively unavailable to plants. There are some plants which are very good at extracting nutrients in less available forms from the soil. When they die, and decompose, the nutrients they contain become available to other plants. They are known as dynamic accumulators and different ones specialise in different nutrients.

Comfrey has a long tap root which can forage in the subsoil for new supplies of its favourite nutrient , potassium (K in the NPK major nutrient rating on chemical fertilisers), which is accumulates in large quantities. It also accumulates N. for which it also has a high appetite in the soil. Some varieties are better than others, the British common comfrey is a prolific self seeder and spreads it's self widely. Russian Comfrey is a hybrid (AKA Blocking 14) it is also a perennial but does not spread either by root or seed, though it is easy to propagate from root cuttings. It contains higher levels of K. and other nutrients than common comfrey, starts growing earlier in the year, yields more heavily and stands cutting better. Russian Comfrey is the dynamic accumulator par excellence and can be planted round the edge of the garden to keep out perennial weeds, cut for compost teas, mulch, and can also be eaten.

We've done the Nitrogen (N) and we've done potassium (K) all we need now is Phosphorous (P).
Some of the best accumulators of P. are legumes. So a mixed planting of comfrey and a perennial legume can make the basis of a good nutritious mulch or compost, containing high levels of the three major nutrients. If the two plants are grown close together and cut regularly, the legume can also contribute towards the comfrey's high N. requirements. Legumes, especially Lucern, also accumulate calcium which is particulaly important on acid soils.

For my plan I included 10% N. fixing Alder, but I had somehow missed part

of the theory on this before I ordered my plants, I fully intended to allow them to grow to full canopy height. Then I watched Geoff Lawtons Estabishing a food forest DVD and the penny dropped. 10% is a good ratio for an established food forest, but establishing it over say 20 years, the ratio should really be 90% at the beginning. Most of the trees will be coppiced on short rotation to supply nutrients as a mulch and N. fix in the soil, then die off as the fruit trees grow and shade most of them out in succession, only 10% left to grow tall and become part of the canopy. I had originally intended to sew White Clover as a ground cover between the trees, but since the revelation I am planting 50 -60 Lupins as they're more useful for mulch and chicken food crop as well as N. fixing, most will be replaced by more Alder species next winter. I would like to plant some legume trees, the Siberian Pea tree sounds excellent as a N. fixing tree and also as a pea crop (bit like lentils) but it likes well drained sandy soil, and probably wouldn't make it in my heavy clay, the search is still on for clay loving legume trees I can also get an edible crop from!

Wherever possible I have chosen species/varieties that are late into bud/leaf for frost tolerance because my research pointed to climate being in a slight cooling trend so I am expecting harsher winters for another 20 yrs based on Sun cycles. Apples varieties are late leaf, all were chosen so they come into flower at approximately similar times for pollination purposes. Plumbs also have different times for pollination, but there's such a variety of prunus with lots of different blackthorn & cherry plumbs in the hedges I didn't aim to match the pollination periods, most are self fertile. Cobs & Filberts (hazel) also have different pollination times, but it's not really an issue with so many varieties here so I didn't really concentrate on it.

Apple varieties in this design:

Acme: Essex 1944. Refreshing & juicy in September, becoming richer and keeping till January without a cold store.

Discovery: 1872 Somerset. Popular russet, crops well, hardy, res. scab & frost.

Fortune: 1904 Beds. Flavour, good yield, hardy, res. scab & frost, but may be biennial.

Keswick Codlin: Keswick Codlin was first found growing as a seedling tree in a rubbish heap at Gleaston

Castle in Lancashire, in the 1790s Since then, Keswick

Codlin has retained its place as a popular mid-season cooking apple, which readily cooks down to a sweet purée. It is also an easy tree for the

gardener.

King of the Damsons: Notts 1880. A.k.a. Bradleys King. Large fruit, regular cropper, mid-Sept

Merryweather: Self Fertile Large damson, fair/good flavour, heavy, precocious, regular crops, sweeter than most, Sep/Oct

Old Greengage: Part Self Fertile. Excellent flavour, moderate crops, green fruit
Plum " Kirkes Blue: Top quality, purple/black skin, yellow flesh, rich, sweet, juicy. Compact tree, yield varies. Aug/Sep.

Plum- Victoria: Victoria is the best known and most popular of English plums, self fertile, sweet red fruit good for eating & preserves.

Plum- Netto special 2.99 end of season sale 2 years back with no name tag moved from garden

Pear- Invincible: NEW French pear for cool sites, hardy, heavy crop, good pollinator.

Mulberry- King James (Chelsea) Grown from cuttings from an old tree in the Chelsea Physick Garden. Very good flavour.

Quince- Siberian Gold: a.k.a. Leskovacka. Heavy yielding, round fruited commercial variety.
Amelanchiers-

A. Canadensis: Juneberry- tall shrub, attractive white blossom followed by edible black berries.

A. Spicata: Garden Shadblow- small bushy shrub under 2 metres tall. White upright blossom and edible dark purple fruit.

Aronia: Viking- Chokeberry. Thornless deciduous shrub to 2 metres. Black berries grown commercially for juice. They turn black early but leave on bush as long as you can.

Loniceria Kamtschatika -Siberian Blueberry: Siberia spreading shrub to about 3 metres. Flowers early spring, followed by blue fruits later.

Loniceria caerulea edulis- Blueberry Honeysuckle: The basic species which can be used to improve pollination with Blue velvet

Lycium barbarum- Goji berry: Berries with high antioxidant levels. Arching shrub with pendant orange fruit. A naturalised specie in parts of the UK.

Mahonias-
Lionel Fortescue: Evergreen shrub to 4 metres, usually less. Yellow fragrant flowers in winter, edible berries in spring.

Winter Sun: evergreen shrub with excellent glossy, dark green foliage. Although most of the leaves stay a dark green colour one or two leaves turn red to make this an eye-catching addition to the winter garden. Mahonia Winter Sun has long lasting, slightly fragrant yellow flowers in winter & spring followed by small edible berries.

Ugni molinae - Chilean Guava: Low evergreen shrub, currant sized fruits with a strawberry-like flavour. Hardy to - 10C. Ripening Nov-Dec.

Nuts-
Chestnut- Marigoule: Early variety with large nuts partially self fertile, I have 2 of these for better pollination.

Hazel - Gustav Zeller: Cobnut - Vigorous early variety, small nuts, good yield

Kentish Cob - Large well-flavoured nuts. The UK commercial variety.

Nottingham Cob - Medium sized nut, thick shell; good flavour & yield; excellent pollinator.Â

Webbs Prize Cob - Large long nuts, similar to Kentish Cob but larger clusters; good in north.

White Filbert - Medium sized, thin-shelled nut, pale skin on kernel. Excellent flavour, compact bush, suits north.

Nut Pine - pinus pinea - Grows well most areas, ornamental blue-grey young leaves, and seems to crop at about 8 years old in the UK.

Myrica Gale - Sweet Gale - Low shrub of peat bogs and acid heaths, to about 1.3 metres. Grey-green leaves and golden catkins in early spring. Another dioecious shrub, i.e. plants are either male or female. Spreads by suckering. Needs a permanently moist soil. All parts have a pleasant resin scent and it has been used as a flavouring and tea, though it should be used with caution as it may induce abortion.
Walnut - wild self seeded local variety moved from poor spot into forest

garden.

Cherry 2 different self seeded wild trees, good croppers, one large red fruit, one slightly darker both good eating & preserving

Alder - Alnus glutinosa: Native Alder for N. fixing

Hazel - Native hazel for coppice.

Ash - Fraxinus excelsio Native for coppice.

Betula Pendula - Birch

Rhubarb roots split and moved from the garden

Comfrey - Russian comfrey - Blocking 14

Arbutus unedo - Strawberry Tree: evergreen shrub or small tree in the heather family, Ericaceae, native to the Mediterranean region and western Europe north to western France and Ireland. Due to its presence in South West Ireland, it is also known as Irish strawberry tree, and Killarney strawberry tree (called 'Caithne' in Irish and Scots Gaelic). The Strawberry Tree grows to 5 -10 metres. The fruit is red 2cm diameter, sometimes called arbutus-berry, with a rough surface. The fruit is edible, though many people find it bland and mealy; the name 'unedo' is explained by Pliny the Elder as being derived from unum edo "I eat one" which may seem an apt response to the flavour. They mainly serve as food for birds but in some countries they are used to make jam and liqueurs (such as the Portuguese medronho, a kind of strong brandy).

Perennials: After trying quite a variety over the years our members think only a few are worth really having in quantity (for their tastes)

Nettles nettles nettles!
ramsons
various perennial onions and leeks
Ground elder (easy! but give it a cordon sanitaire)
perennial leaf beet
wild rocket (sunny/polytunnel best)
sorrel
peppermint for tea
perennial Kale - needs regrowing from cuttings regularly or can die out
musk mallow
turkish rocket
lime tree leaves, we also use quite few annual 'weeds'

Favourite perennials for this system are
Sea Orach (leaf) Shrub Layer
Sweet Cicely (Leaf and Root) Herbaceous
Day Lillies,(Leaf, Root, Shoots and Flowers) Herbaceous
Sorrel /herb Robert (Leaf) Herbaceous
Japanese yams (Roots) Climber
Comfry (Leaf) Herbaceous
American Ground Nuts (Roots) Climber
Nasturtium especially Mashua the tuberous variety (Roots) Herbaceous
Everlasting Onion, Tree onions and serpent garlic
Rhubarb (Stalks) Ground
Alpine Strawberries
Lovage (Leaf, Stalk, Root) Herbaceous

I have found these annuals work well as part of the system
Winter Radish (The variety Hildas Blue worked well for me)
Salsify
Chard
Evening Primrose (roots)
Hamburg Parsley
Mitsuba (Japanese parsley)

Question: Can you survive from a forest garden?

It's a useful system for a portion of our home food production. - a sensible space saving way of growing fruit/nuts and some greenery with minimal effort. It isn't likely to be acceptable to most folk as a sole method of food production. The woodland garden is only part of the overall plan which includes annual vegetables and home bred poultry.

One hurdle is knowing which perennials to put in, and weather we can adapt to eating them all. It is a shame man did not put the same breeding efforts into perennials he did with annual crops, life would be so much easier! The nuts should work as a substitute for grains, and be much less work.

Planning the understory layers, I have come to realise the sheer number of plants I'm going to need means I'll have to dedicate a nursery area, or the whole project becomes cost prohibitive.

References used in this post:

Martin Crawford "Creating a Forest Garden - working with nature to grow edible crops". Excellent reference book, covers every type of tree, shrub, and perennial food plant for the cool temperate zone, over an inch thick A4. Plenty of pics of the unusual stuff too. There is a great example of a forest garden on the outskirts of Totnes in Devon which was set up by Martin Crawford in the mid 90's, he reckons to spending about a day a week maintaining his garden but adds that most of that time is spent harvesting! He says on the Farms for a Futrue BBC documentary that a high yield set up will feed approximately 10 people per acre as opposed to

5 for regular agricultural land.

Patrick Whitefield: "How to make a forest garden" which seems to concentrate on designs that can be used in the average garden, it could be as small as one apple tree with plumbs on dwarf stock under, gooseberries, cane fruit and other layers in the corner of the garden.

Robert Hart “Forest Gardening” A great book from an original forest gardener in the UK.

Geoff Lawton – Permaculture Research Institute Australia “Establishing a Food Forest” DVD – a really useful film explaining the design theory in depth, although tropical species are mentioned the design concept can be easily translated to a cool temperate zone.

7 level beneficial guild picture used with the kind permission of Graham Burnett www.spiralseed.co.uk

Gooseberries by British Red

Well John, I noticed today that the leaf buds are starting to open on my gooseberry plants

So I thought "time to prune that plant and show John how I do it". Now I tried photographing the process on a big one - but to be honest its hard to see against the soil. However I picked up some cheap ones on sale recently that I want to pot grow so I've taken a few pictures of doing one of those.

First thing was to look the plant over

What was immediately clear was that a nurseryman had done a good job growing it already - notice the scar from previous pruning out of the middle?

However you can see that that central portion is starting to regrow. I want to achieve a "bowl shape" growth to let light and air into the middle of the plant, and to help get my hands in for picking - so the central growth had to go

Next any of the side growths that were growing back across the centre were pruned out

I also tend to take out any new branches that will cross other branches as they grow - I elarned this pruning fruit trees - it keeps things nice and open.

As I said - I want to pot grow this guy so I knocked him out and was delighted witht he root ball

Now that he's potted up, I hope the "open centre" is more apparent

Hope that helps a bit anyway

Red

Mushrooms from a kit

by Chris Breen
Not a cheap option but an interesting experiment

keep the block of culture material Damp and you will have mushrooms in three weeks, instruction say multiple harvests can be taken from the same block.

Pictures taken after 10 days and shows bare areas of the block its all like this to start. Some firsts shoots of mushrooms and some more mature examples creeing over the edger of the box. These are oyster mushrooms, you can also buy shitake and field varieties

...on tools and trees and drier drums by British Red

Today we created a new fruit bed on an area that had previously been one of the many "dumping areas" of the previous residents. I had previously killed and dug out the nettles and couch grass, but the ground was still pretty rough.

Out came tool # 1 - our Rotovator

Tips on rotovators - but a big one and above all ***get one with reverse*** . When your rotovator blades are 6" underground, dragging it out backwards with brute strength gets really old, really fast! Rotovating is just as hard work as digging - but you get more land done faster.

When your rotovator "rides up" out of the ground, its because it has hit something hard. In this case - a huge lump of concrete (base of an old fence post). Enter tool #2 - a 6 foor floor bar (straight crowbar). With a log for a fulcrum, digging out the concrete post base was a quick job (although carring it off wasn't)

Having dug out three wheelbarrows of fence posts bases (2), brick, tile, hinges, wire, concrete and sundry rubbish, we had a nice tidy bed of soft soil

Into this bed we wanted to plant a couple of fig trees we have pot grown (well actually bucket grown) and a load of gooseberry bushers we produced as "layers" from our old hosue. The thing with fig trees is that if you don't restrict their roots, they take a century or so to fruit. Traditionally, brick lined pits were constructed for this. I could have done this, but I wanted to try a tip from a book - washing machine drums. They have holes to let moisture in, but the holes are small enough to mean large roots can't get out. We couldn't get washing machine drums - but we got a couple of drier drums from the local tip.

Trouble with drier drums is they don't have holes! Enter tool #3 - a stonking big drill with a small metal bit.

Basically I drilled the snot out of the bottom 2/3 of the drum all the way round

After drilling, I wanter to take off the lip from what would become the top of the drum. This is so that I can plant the tree right against one wall - for

reasons that will become clear later.

With the lip removed (just remove a few screws) we have this

Having done the same to a second drum, I put the drums where the trees were to go

Enter tool #4 - a Devon (long handled) spade. For digging deep holes, ditch work etc, long handled spades save your back a lot of grief! Mine is known as *"poppas burying shovel"* 😃

I laid out the other tools ready for use - tree stakes, tree guards, ties, club hammer, post rammer and spirit level.

Next a hole was made slightly wider than the drum and deep enough that the drum would sit in the hole level with the soil

The sides were back filled

Some soil was placed in the bottom and washed through the holes to ensure no air pockets existed under the drum

This is the fruiting fig we have been pot growing for a couple of years. Bought them as "dead" twigs in the winter in a garden centre for a couple of quid apiece

Testing the pot in the soil (against the wall of the drum) shows it sitting too deep. Its important not to plant fruit trees at a different level than the soil in the pot as this can mess up grafts etc.

More soil in the bottom brought the tree to the right height

The tree is at the edge of the pot because I want to stake it. The drum would prevent the stake being knocked in deeply enough - so I will put the stake outside the drum. This is why the tree needs to be near the edge of the drum.

The drum is then filled in with rich soil and manure and watered well to prevent air pockets.

Next the tree stake is banged in about 18" with a club hammer - tool #5. A decent club hammer is invaluable around the homestead - from banging bolsters to tapping in earth bonds.

When the stake is in firm (not hard) tool #6 comes out - the spirit level. If its worth doing, its worth doing right!

Now for tool #7 - the post rammer. These are metal tubes, sealed at one end with handles on the side. Because they go over the already vertical stake, they drive straght - you cant hit the post "off centre". Because they are heavy, they drive several inches each bang. They are much easier and faster than using a sledge hammer - especially above shoulder height on big fence posts.

Next a tree guard is put around the trunk - this stops vermin eating the tender bark and killing the tree by "ring barking"

After this a tree tie secures the tree to the stake to prevent wind damage. Note the "figure eight" shape (not one loop but two). This stops the tree "twanging" into the stake and damaging the bark by acting as a shock absorber

Hers the finished bed - two fig trees and ten well spaced gooseberries that we will "layer" to fill the bed over the next couple of years.

I hope thats interesting to show a few tools that are interesting, general tree planting techniques and specific fig tree root restriction.
Red

Chapter 2 Animals

Hiving a Swarm by Souter

You may have seen the swarm of bees I spotted on Saturday over in the Photo gallery.

I had mentioned I had previously sited a bait hive nearby the previous weekend and had the bee suit and veil in the van so it was too good an opportunity to miss.

The only thing I could find in the back of my van to collect the swarm in was a plastic box I normally keep my odds and sods in, still needs must emptying the box i was ready.

First collect your swarm,
naturally they were just above a comfortable height, so positioning the box underneath the swarm, and having to stand directly below it myself

You then give the tree a vigorous shake to dislodge the swarm so they fall into the box (while standing on tiptoe, holding the box in one hand and shaking the tree with the other)

(You can see the shadow of the swarm through the translucent plastic of the box)

The traditional way of hiving a swarm is to build a ramp leading up to the hive and cover it with a white sheet. You dump the swarm at the base of the ramp. Bees tend to crawl upwards so eventually the first few enter the hive. finding it to their liking they communicate it to the rest of the swarm who then form an orderly queue and march into the hive. I've seen it done and its damn impressive.
Still I'm not a traditionalist in all things.

I just took the roof off the hive and poured them in.

So in answer to the question "Is there still honey for tea?" the answer is hopefully this year.

The old beekeepers rhyme:
A swarm in may is worth a load of hay.
A swarm in June is worth a silver spoon.
And a swarm in July isn’t worth a fly.

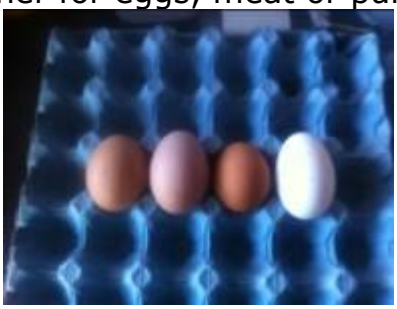
Adventures with Chickens

By Chris Breen

As part of my ongoing aims to be self-sufficiency I acquired four hens in February 2010. Since then the four girls have settled in well and we have developed a mutual understanding. I feed them they give me eggs.

Breeds

There are hundreds of different breeds of chickens distinguished by size, plumage colour, egg colour amongst other things. There are also Hybrids which are crosses of true breeds. Chickens can also be divided by their use either for eggs, meat or purely for show.



Hybrid Chickens bred for eggs will usually produce one a day each. I've never had less than three eggs a day from my four hens even in the depth of winter with snow on the ground. Traditional Breeds lay around 200 eggs a year stopping in winter and rarer breeds can be a lot less. Laying life is around 4 or 5 years. An average Price of a Hybrid chicken at POL is £12 around here with vaccinations.

Chickens start laying at around 21 weeks old but are said to be at Point of Lay (POP) after 16 weeks at this age they are also eating adult layers mix. Chickens are normally bought aged between 16 – 21 weeks. It's very exciting when your first egg arrives.

Social Habits

Chickens are very sociable and tend to stick together, when I bought mine I originally thought of buying two then increasing them after a while but was advised to get them all together. This is apparently as they attack new comers to the flock in order to establish the 'pecking order'. Mine seem to be fairly evenly tempered although the smallest is certainly the bossiest.

Taming

When I first had them they constantly ran away from me. It took them about two weeks for them to associate me with food and now they come to me if I'm in the garden or even in the conservatory. If I go to pick them up which is rare they now squat and puff up their feathers. I initially thought this was an attempt to make them look bigger but have since discovered it's what they do before the cock mounts them. I now know where I fit in the flock but I'm sure they are disappointed by my lack of attention.

Housing

Basically they need some sort of shelter in which to sleep and lay eggs. Mine seem only to nip in there to lay then are out and about again. They also sit on top of the run to sleep. Housing could be a garden shed or a purpose built coop with hatching boxes and an enclosed run as shown below. You can get a perfectly good coop for less than £100 or pay a lot more if you want something fancy

I started with the coop and a ten foot run, then added an enclosed area of lawn around 8x20 foot surrounded by chicken wire both to protect and contain the hens. However they started climbing on top of the coop and jumping over the fence. To counter this I added a net over the top, in response they tunneled under the fence, after many attempts to keep them contained and failing they now have the run of the back garden.

Issues

There are several issues with having very free range hens. You can forget having a nice lawn as they will scratch it up particularly if they are house in a small area. They excrete everywhere which is inconvenient and messy, I clean around the coop once a week and pick up odd bits as I come across it. They are very fond of dust bathes and although they often go under the hedge and dig a hollow, they are also very fond of my raised beds. They eat and dig up your fruit and veg if you grow any. I now have crop netting over anything tasty. They tended to ignore the potatoes, onions and strawberries but were very partial too peas and beans.

Plus points

Obviously loads of eggs, meat if you are keeping them for that and a fair amount of compost material. They are also quite amusing to have around and the neigbours ask about them and kids love them.

Feeding

They will eat your vegetable waste and scratch round the garden looking for nasty morsels, however the bulk of their diet is a meal mixture of grains. I add to this with the occasional scoop of 'chicken treat' which looks like muesli which is a big hit pictured left below.

A 20KG bag of meal cost £8.50 and lasts four hens 4-6 weeks. I use a gravity feeder which limits the amount they can get to at one time. They

are very messy eaters and if you were to put it in an open bowl they would tip it over, or scratch it out or just excrete in it. After a very wet winter I would advise having a sheltered feeding area for them as if open it get very muddy and there grain gets damp and inedible. I'm luck enough to have an old aviary at the bottom of the garden which they can use.

In order to keep the egg shells healthy you can recycle shells from eggs you use I stick mine in a blender for a few seconds much easier than crushing by hand and add a bit to their food. If you drop and break an egg whilst collecting them the hens will fight over it as an extra treat. Try not to do this or they may start eating their own eggs.

Water is dispensed in a similar way but they much prefer rain water to tap water and will drink from any garden container so be careful what you leave out.

Looking after your birds

It is suggested you clip the flight feathers of one wing to stop them flying in a straight line and thus escaping. I haven't bothered as I would prefer to give them a fighting chance to get away if a fox did get into the garden plus there have shown no interest in escaping despite sitting on both my back fence which leads to fields and my neighbours fences fortunately they don't mind.

Just like most of us they don't like getting their feet wet, very wet conditions can cause foot rot and they like somewhere to sit where they get a good view. This can be achieved with a few stones or slabs dotted about or if their posh like mine the patio furniture.

Keep an eye on the straw in the laying box and sawdust on the floor of the coop and clean or replace as required.

Other than the points above you can let them get on with their lives with little interference.

Happy chicken keeping!

Chapter 3 Trapping & Gathering

Simple Crayfish Trap by Countryboy

Right, now firstly I must point out that freshwater fishing in the UK with a trap (without the necessary permits) is illegal. Restrictions on the catching and releasing of crayfish are also in place - more info can be found here:

http://www.defra.gov.uk/fish/freshwater/crayfish.htm

Don't just start trapping, check things out for yourself and make sure you're doing things legally. To that end, this is posted here for interest purposes only:

Firstly, take one empty pop bottle (2 litre size):

Cut the end off just after the shoulder (where the sides of the bottle start to run parallel) and also cut off the neck to leave a slightly larger hole (discard the neck):

Fix a decent sized stone inside the large section of the bottle to act as a weight:

In this example, four holes have been cut into the underside of the bottle, and a cord threaded through to hold the stone down:

Next, reverse the remaining section of the bottle and push it into the larger part. Make a series of holes through both parts and start to thread another cord through to lace them together. This cord needs to be able to be removed to get at anything caught:

Here’s the neck of the trap completely laced in place:

Finally take a decent length of cord (about 2m used here) and tie it around the body of the trap. This allows easy setting and removal of the trap and also provides something to tether the whole lot to the riverbank. Here's the completed trap:

The trap should be baited with any old bits of meat (apparently the smellier the better!) It needs to be set in the water with the open end facing into the flow of water. The simple logic is that the crayfish climb in to get at the bait, but the reversed cone of the opening makes it impossible for them to get out again.

I suppose it would work well at the seaside for crabs/lobsters etc too.

This one is fairly rough in construction as I only used a knife to make it. By using scissors to cut things and a heated iron to make holes, a neater job could be achieved. I felt my way was more in keeping with making a survival trap, though.

Tree Tapping by British Red

Not too many photos but these might interest someone..... This is the process to tap Birch sap from a tree. Its best done in March or April when the sap is (literally) rising. The resultant sap has been filtered by the tree and tastes lovely as a refreshing drink. It can also be fermented to birch wine, boiled down to give something like maple syrup etc. Anyway - if it's interesting, heres a bit of a write up

First, make your hole...ours was done with a brace and bit, however you could easily use a sharp knife tip. The hole we made was about half an inch in diameter and angled slightly upwards into the tree - this helps the sap to flow out and down.

Next take a 4" straight section of branch. Taper the end to be inserted into the tree to ensure a tight fit. Groove a deep gutter along the top with your knife tip and cut a notch towards the outer end of the gutter to stop the string falling off when you hang your collecting jar off the gutter. The gutter was tapped firmly in place with an axe poll. Drips formed almost straight away

We used a 750ml olive jar. We tied a kite string handle (remember the kite string in the possibles pouch?) around it to suspend it from the gutter.

This is the finished "rig". The drips came fast - imaging the speed of a fairly fast dripping tap. The jar was filled to the brim in less than 12 hours

Last job was to whittle a solid plug, remove the gutter and hammer the plug in with the poll of an axe to plug the tree - no harm done to the tree!

Wild food is easy - wild drink takes a bit more time 😀

Red

Improvised Tree Tap

by British Red

I have always used a pretty simple tree tapping technique – this is one from last year – 1 ½ pint jar, hung by string on a tap carved from a handy branch by using a sharp knife to make a "gutter" (anyone detect my normal "small sharp knife" preference here)

Anyway, I was lucky enough to see how the professionals do it here

So I thought I could improve my normal improvised design

Here's the prototype

Step 1 locate a suitable (dead) elder – or another similar tree with a soft pith

You can see the suitability for improvising tree taps and other “pipes” from the end of this dead branch

So out with Red’s ever present pocket saw. I’m looking for a branch a little thicker than a fingers width – it needs to wind up about ½ ” thick when the bark is off

I don’t need a lot – the finished tap will be 4” long or so – I cut enough for a couple of failures

So – we cut a suitable section of wood – I try to cut between side shoots, finding a nice straight piece. You can see the soft inner pith of the elder in this shot

Next job is to taper one end to about 3/8” or 10mm in new money

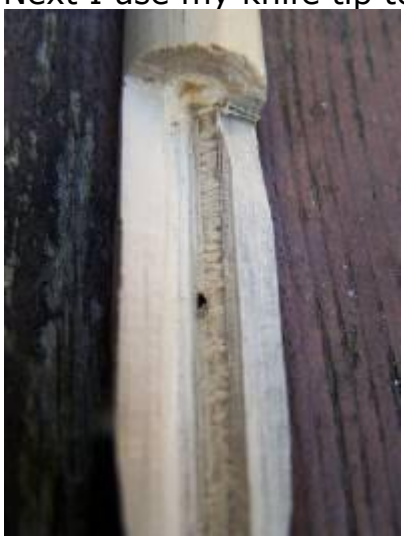
Next I peel all the bark off and shave back to a neat(ish) cylinder

I make a saw "stop cut" halfway through the tap – into the middle of the pith. The cut is 1/3 of the way along the tap from the "blunt" end.

Elder splits really easily, so using the blade of my pocket knife, I rest the blade across the middle of the tapered end and push – a split will run to the "stop" cut

I shape a slightly deeper groove into the stop cut to hang my collecting vessel from

Next I use my knife tip to remove the pith from the centre channel



I Use a twig or bit of wire to push the pith from the remaining solid section

Finally, I improvise a collecting device. This is an old detergent box (handy since it has a lid to keep flies and so on out). A baked bean tin with a hole in would work though as would your billy can

Lastly of course, bore a hole in your tree of choice with knife tip or "brace and bit" if you want to get really fancy – knock in the tap, hang the collecting device from it. Job done
Not as fancy as Johns by a long chalk though

Red

Fishing tips and General advice
by Putty

General Pointers

There are no hard and fast rules to sea fishing, what works in Devon may not work in Ireland, but may be scoffed at in Durham and so on.

This will not be by any means exhaustive I will just offer some pointers that worked for me over the years. I am not an expert but I get better year on year here is what I have found.

OK so what do I know about it? I have been a Sea Angler for approx 30 years and had some nice fish but never the monster I want, but I will get it one day. Fortunately a couple of people have taken me under their wing and my knowledge has really grown, some of this info I will pass to you.

If you're going to try fishing you will probably know someone who can assist where you live, fishing is the second most popular sport in the UK, second only to Stamp collecting. There are many publications and forums from which to glean and contribute knowledge, also some people recommend joining a club, personally not me as I find them more secretive than the FBI, but this may not be the case where you live, great if you want to fish competitions and take it seriously. I fish for me, to spend time with friends and family and occasionally put something on the table.

There are many styles of saltwater fishing; I choose this definition wisely as this can include estuaries, beach, rock, pier, breakwater etc.

First off get into a mind set and Think fish!!

So you decide you want to catch a fish be it for sport or food on the table, you could get a cheapo rod and reel from a tackle trader and a loaf of bread head for the nearest breakwater, pier, rocks and catch a 5lb Mullet 1st cast, but in all theory you wont if you do it will surely be luck and will probably never happen again.

Before we move on to tackle, and venues and differences in hooks, rods, reels etc etc lets think about Fish in general.

1st off they have to eat so where are the going to eat, think about where smaller fish, crabs, molluscs, worms congregate a couple of quick examples Prawns and small fish stay close to rocks and weed for protection, worms live in the sand, molluscs live in rocks, weed, Crab live anywhere where there are nooks and crannies for them to get into.

Where these creatures live should be a target area where I said live in rocks also think manmade rock ie pontoons, piers, breakwaters etc where I say weed also think manmade weed chains, ropes etc so these areas will hold bait, therefore proper sized fish will eat the bait and hunt these areas out.

Fish will eat all bait, BUT they will favour certain types in this neck of the woods, Gilt Head Bream will hit peeler crab and little else, Bass will kill for live prawn, and peeler crab (peeler crab is a crab with breaks its shell for growth and is at its juiciest, giving off fish attracting pheromones) so you need to be armed with their favourite food.

The bait they eat is affected by tide state, think prawns and peeler crabs at low water will be on the shoreline, in rock pools, damp areas etc so when the tide floods there areas the fish will be exposed to marauding predators, so worth thinking about when you decide at what time to fish, no point going on an outgoing tide. Also Plaice, rays and other flat fish wait in sand channels and wait for their prey to come along this is your target area has a look at low tide to see where these channels are.

Feeding habits, some favour first and last light as killer times especially for Bass and I have found personally this to be totally inaccurate I have caught fish (bass and others) all times of the day and night, my theory which is shared with others is most people go fishing before or after work catch fish so this is the best time.

Also think what is about at what time of year, in the winter months fish head off towards deeper or warmer waters so no good looking for mackerel, mullet or bass in December or January although applying the no hard and fast rule they can be caught but as a rarity rather then in quantity.

All the above will come with a little bit of work, as in all things effort in = reward out.

TOP EXAMPLE Bass love prawns if you make the effort to get prawns the night before or collect and keep them your chances of catching them will increase 100 fold, compared to just turning up with bait or spinners, I never go float fishing for bass without live prawn.

I know a lot of people who are desperate to catch a bass but turn up with a few strips of Frozen mackerel and get antsy as they cant get one ever!! I catch approx a quarter of my annual bass by accident when targeting other species which actually gets on your nerves!!

As a final point on Bass, they are not a mythical species that are hard to catch they are everywhere, and can be caught quite easily if you are targeting Bass and do not catch one in 5 -10 trips you are doing something wrong.

One further thing if you hit a hot spot for any species, keep it to yourself are at most your trusted fishing companion, as guaranteed the next time you

turn up it will be full of fishermen or trawled up stopping you catching.
The biggest way to blab off is via a fishing forum so be carefull.

Starting out.

Rods, reels and tackle do matter but at the novice stage best to borrow off a friend or get a cheapo set, all rods and reels will catch, as will all terminal tackle, again I will cover differences in line, hooks, floats etc as we progress.

Target a particular species or a selection of spices, for your area or time of year. I would suggest if you want to catch a few fish hang fire until June July time, get a cheap spinning set from a Tackle shop, head off to a pier or breakwater and go for a Mackerel session, they will be abundant and it will not be hard to catch a fair old few. Please do only take what you need, or what you intend to freeze down for bait, nothing sickens me more than seeing tourists in the Torbay area catching Mackerel 6 at a time on feathers and killing them all no doubt to be thrown away when they get the bin liner full back to the caravan, yep seriously I have seen people do this.

Whilst in the middle of summer you could turn up anywhere with a bit of the Briny and cast out and get a bucketful of mackerel, garfish, dabs, plaice, Bass, Mullet other months can be sparse for them so define your target species, no point in turning up for a session when fish are not about, this is relevant in December March which are really slow months in the fishing calendar, only doggies, flounders, whiting and Thornies about really, so no point in trying for anything else.

You can find out what is being caught and when by using our the internet, sites like World Sea Fishing (WSF) have members constantly updating, where they have been and what they have caught, another source is local papers they often have a weekly fish report, as do the angling magazines.

People suggest joining a local Sea Anglers Club and attending events and gleaning information from them some places are supposed to be quite forthcoming with info others are not, so that ones up to you. I am a member of a club but not for gaining plastic pots to fill the mantle, nor do I fish a competition, I fish when I want and where I want.

I am a member just in case I ever catch a nice one they do the submissions to records and relevant organisations. I have not weighed in a fish in years, I always said I will not weigh in a fish less than 100% specimen fish are noted as what constitutes a nice size for the species, that is considered a 100% or specimen weight a Bass form shore is 6lb 8oz so a 4lb 4oz is a 50% specimen, 9lb 12 oz a 150% specimen; I have had a few over this size but let them go. Most sea angling clubs also have a club house or meet in pubs.

Another good source of info is your friendly tackle dealer; he may point you in the right direction, or may let something slip inadvertently in conversation. The more you buy the cheaper things will become, and more banter and advice will come your way.

So we know about and roughly where people are getting the fish, we need to arm up with our gear, and bait, as mentioned previously the right bait really does matter, and off we go for a fish, again I will elaborate on tactics later, but for now we will say we have gone with a bit of knowledge.

Log your trips, I used to use a diary and refer back the previous years to check what fish I caught, and also what I saw other people catch or info from the local paper for that week, you can then have a good knowledge as to what is about when you want to go, therefore target a particular species. Also log tide state, wind force/direction, temperatures etc etc, may sound trivial but you will soon notice patterns i.e. you catch in a certain area when the winds a light westerly and not too sunny, but do not when its a northerly with no wind, yep this is true!!.

I now use my blog as a fishing log, www.puttyuk.wordpress.com one thing you may have notices is that I often do not list where I caught fish especially Bass, and even more especially nice Bass. Bass are very sought after for their taste and the sport you get from them, there is a minimum size and nursery areas, which are flagrantly flouted by some who illegally sell to Chinese Restaurants, therefore I do not let people know where I catch them nor do I let out any of my secret marks, if you do get a couple of nice ones and blab it on a blog, via word of mouth, or post on an internet forum, rest assured the next time you go it will be fished by many people or in the worst case netted or trawled, lessening if not destroying your chances of a repeat catch.

I also have a better knowledge of what is about and when; I target Bass September and October, Gilt Head Bram in May and June, Thornies in February and March and so on.

When your knowledge grows and you want to target species and know what grounds they like, time of year, bait etc. Go on google maps and look at the coast lines, estuaries, rivers and think where they may be, as a starter and a little bit of a tip look at an estuary and see where it narrows, you may want at some point to look at or buy an admiralty chart, look at the sand banks, using common sense at low tide fish will be funnelling in or out of a shorter more narrow channel so nature is helping you locate your target area but greater concentrating fish in to a smaller area.

Tackle.

Tackle is a personal choice but I will offer what I personally use, it will differ from person to person and which species of fish is targeted in various localities. Cost is also another option which needs to be considered, of course quality comes with cost but a £10 rod and reel will catch the same as a £100 rod and reel in most conditions.

Rods

There are various types of rods and believe it or not if you do take it up seriously you will need a few I have about 7 I can think of off the top of my head.

Some rod parts,
Butt - the base part i.e. the bottom and hold/handle bits.
Tip - the end part, reel seat where the reel is placed.
Reel seat - where the reel sits OR Coasters sliding/movable reel securing loops don't want to get too techie here but apparently the reels position relevant to the location on the butt section makes difference in casting distance.
Rings - guide the line from butt to tip, 2 different styles for fixed spool or multiplier reels.

Beach casters are usually longer rods for wanging out a lead and bait over the horizon.

Spinning rods, are smaller and lighter designed for casting smaller lures/spinners and generally quite whippy for slinging minimal weight out with a whip.

Carp rods, a great all round rod for floating/spinning/plugging and light beach work.

There are additionally light beachcasters, Bass Rods, Flattie rods and a few others.

All rods are classed by weight or in carp rods TC (test curve). A beach caster may be classed to 6 oz meaning designed to cast a 6oz weight, or 3-5 oz, 2-4 oz etc i.e the weight the rod can handle no point in putting a 8oz weight on a 2-4 oz rated rod or it'll be bad times!!

TC used mainly in carp rods is the weight at the tip which will take the tip to a 90'angle to the butt so a rod with a 1¾ lb TC means it will need 1 ¾ lbs to attain a right angle tip to butt.

So which on should you buy? Depends on what type of fishing you are going to do to be honest, if estuary fishing for flatties a light beach caster or get a ways with a carp rod, codding, bull hussing a heavy beachcaster, mackerel or

Gar fishing a spinner or carp rod.

There are many manufacturers and of course many different price ranges, same as anything you get what you pay for, there are brand new Rolls Royces and 20 year old Ford escorts both will get you there but do you want a smooth ride to last for years or a bumpy one to last for a couple of years?

For those starting go towards the cheaper end of the spectrum and if you want to get better kit keep the ropey stuff as a spare set or give it to someone wanting to take it up.

Conoflex, Shakespeare, Shimano, Greys, Ron Thompson, Fladden, are all makers form conoflex (dear) to Fladden (cheap).

A rods purpose is to put bait into the water, if you are flattie fishing on a beach you may have to cast the bait out a fair distance so will need a beach caster, if float fishing off a pier/breakwater you only need a light flicky rod.

In all cases match the rod to your fishing requirements small weights and small fish can be caught with all rods but more fun/sport on lighter gear.

My personal rods are

Greys BZE x 2 for Bass, Bream, Flatties
Greys GRX for Thornies and long casting
Cheap beachcaster as a back up.
Ron Thompson 3 section Spinning rod, for Bass, Mackerel etc (I keep this in the car in Summer for impromptu sessions)
Rovex 3lb TC Carp rod, serious Bassing and Wrassing rod, a belter of a rod
Cheap little spinning rod, Mrs Putty uses.

Telescopic rod

Std 2 piece rod

Multi section road

Reels

There are 2 popular styles of reels used today, a fixed spool or a multiplier, centre pins are not used and I have never seen one used as they are so dated.

They are in their basic form a device for holding, casting and retrieving line. And have a switch or arm to disengage the lock of the spool, or to put it in free spool for casting.

A fixed spool is literally hassle free and can be mastered in seconds and requires little tuning or maintenance. A multiplier is often though of as a more experienced anglers reel and can generally cast further, but more prone to tangles (birds nest/frapp ups) needs tuning and can be a little more on the pricey side.

Despite the statement above Fixed spools have come on in leaps and bounds over recent years and some fixed spools can I believe perform as well as multipliers, I personally use a mixture of the 2 depending on what I am targeting.

Some reel parts

Spool where the line is wound around.
Drag tension adjuster for line to be pulled from spool for fighting fish.
Handle for winding
Bail arm on fixed spool reels for casting.
Ratchet acts as a bite alarm.

Bearings and gears everywhere.

Reels come in different sizes identified in increments of 500 or 1000 small sizes for smaller rods and tackle and large for large i.e. 2000, 3000, 4000, 4500, 5000, 6000, 6500 etc

So a 2000 is smallest small light tackle and rods up to and beyond 10000 for marlin on boat trips etc.

The drag is a very important as it acts like a tension adjuster for the line, and must be set to the lines breaking strain the point at what force the line will break. Imagine a 10lb piece of fishing line hanging from the ceiling if you put a 9lb weight on it, it would happily support it, an 11lb weight would snap it, so if your targeting Bass for instance a bass upto 10 lbs would be ok on a 10lb piece of line right? Wrong!!! Remember the Bass will pull against this line to try to get away increasing more weight on the line and ping lost line and lost fish, so the drag is set to allow line to come off the spool at a set point so for 10lb line set your drag to about 6 - 8lbs and it wont snap if fishy makes a run for it.

The drag also tires out a fish remember it will try to swim away (mostly) if its swimming against tension it will tire out and be easier to land when exhausted this is called playing a fish.

Retrieve ratio means the gearing ratio so a ratio of 5:1 means the spool revolves 5 times per one 360 rotation of the handle.

Ratchet is a switch you can engage on reels which puts the spool in a slight drag situation where as if a fish bites and runs it will allow the fish to take line and a clicking sound will emit from the reel telling you that you have a bite.

If the ratchet is not engaged and you are not paying attention a fish could take your rod reel and whole set up into the briny, not happened to me personally but I know it has happed too many others.

Again many different manufacturers and great differences in prices, from £5 to £500.

My personal reels are.

Shimano Speed master Multiplier the Daddy of multipliers.
Abu Chrome Rocket 6500
Shimano Exage 400
Shimano Areo bait runners x 2 there are damn good.
5000 sized Shakespeare fixed spool.

2000 Shimano Avio fixed spool.

As a final few points on Rods and Reels match your rod and reel wisely, there is no point on putting an 8000 sized reel on a light spinning outfit, nor a 2000 reel on a heavy beach caster. It comes with experience and personal choice.

Living in Torbay I often see muscle bound holiday makers using whacking great beach casters and reels and thick lines fishing for mackerel, hurling their baits or lures and not getting out too far, when I come a long with a whippy carp rod, a 4000 size reel and braid (I'll go into that later) and a small shiny lure and cast well past them, and get the fish.

Size is not everything!!!

Casting your outfit is all a matter of timing and technique (of course this is also dependant on what you are using see above comment) of your balanced kit.

Technique and power = Distance

Multiplier

Fixed Spool

Tackle

Hook, Line and Sinker.

This section refers to what additional smaller items are needed to go fishing.

The combination of tied hooks, swivels, line, beads is called a "Rig" or "End Tackle", therefore the bits are Rig Components.

Make your own rigs from your own tackle, whilst pre made rigs are easier you do not know from where they came or the qualities of gear used so don't use them.

Hooks

Hooks come in various sizes and are graded thus (as a guide there are smaller and bigger)

12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 1/0 2/0 3/0 4/0 5/0 6/0 7/0 8/0 9/0
Small tooooooo Big

Match the size of your hook to the size of the bait you will use, to the size of a fishes mouth

So for Mulleting with a small bait a size 8 – 5, Mackie bashing with a Mackerel/Squid Strip 2 – 1/0, Bass with a prawn/Sandeel 3/0, Bull Huss with a whole Squid 8/0 Marlin with a Bonito 15/0!!!

There are also different gauges of hook thin wiry or Aberdeen for small or light fish, to thicker styles. Make sure you use the correct thickness of hook for your prey; a hook which can bend may do so for a hard hitting fish so select a thicker gauge. I am still personally kicking myself as 2 years ago my rod went metal whilst fishing for Gilt Heads, I struck the fish and it was HUGE, then lost it as the hook straightened Grrrrrrrrr, Never again!!!.

Line

Line comes in 3 variants Mono, Flourcarbon or Braid.

Mono is made form Nylon and stretches and is spooled in breaking strain and diameter i.e 6lb thin 25 thick cheap as chips, but avoid double strength or half thickness types as they are rubbish!!

Again match the thickness of your line to your quarry, a 4lb mullet can be caught on 6 lb line and the lesser diameter makes it harder for the fish to see, although some lines claim to be invisible to fish I am personally not convinced.

Some are clear, some brown, some red, all have there pros and cons apparently I personally go for a brown colour for no reason in particular.

Also Mono will rub against structures; rock etc so should be checked for abrasion periodically, again if beach fishing with a few stones on the beach check at the end of a session if Bassing, Pollocking or Wrassing on rocky

ledges with rocky gullies check virtually every cast.

Mono comes in various prices and on the whole generally cheap.

Flourocarbon

Is similar to mono but allegedly is harder to see in the water, and is a little more brittle, not sure if it works or not, but I do use it for my traces/rigs.

Braid

Braid is a mix of fibres braided together it is remarkable thin, strong and has no stretch, therefore it is favoured by some anglers, because you are in direct contact with a fish as soon as you lift the rod tip to strike as there is no slack to take up, whereas mono is stretchy.

Also as the diameter is thinner you can cast further, but as its thinner is more susceptible to rub and snap, therefore a rubbing leader of mono is often used to bear the brunt of the abrasion from rocks and other structures.

All this technology comes at a price and a 100yd spool can cost up to £25.

One problem braid has is the dreaded "Wind Knot" where the line is so thin and floppy the wind can blow against it on the cast and you can be in a world of hurt trying to untangle it, or bite the bullet and cut £10's worth off!!

I personally use braid for float fishing and spinning and mono for all other types of fishing.

Shock leader

Shock leader is an amount usually 3 rod lengths of heavy mono tied to then end of your mono/braid when using beach caster and heavy weights.

This is a safety measure and must be employed when distance/power casting heavy weights. Reason is imagine you are using a 12.5 ft beach caster with 15lb line and a 6oz weight the power/inertia/speed the weight in full swing is liable to snap the line therefore a 6oz weight could be winging its way through the air upwards/sideways and is liable to kill someone.

People can cat 6 oz in excess of 300 yards, attached to their line and reels obviously this creates friction consequently in theory an unattached weight can hit colossal speeds and distance.

It is deemed necessary for 10lb breaking strain of leader for every 1oz of weight i.e. 5 oz 50lb, 6 oz 60lb etc.

The reason for a 3 times rod length is several turns on the reel, the length of the rod and the drop from rod tip to the weight.

I always use shock leader if someone next to you is not tell them of the dangers.

Sinkers.

Sinkers, lead, weights call them what you will their role is to get the line out to where you want it and either hold it there or move in to an area.

You cannot cast too far with out it, remember this is sea fishing not fly fishing, some times for Mulleting tiny weights and dust shot are required and to reach further distances more weight is required.

Grippers are weights which have 4 wires usually sticking out the sides so when you cast the wires grip the sand or rocks and prevent movement, great for high swells and currents, when you reel in the wires fold (intentionally) allowing any snag to be overcome and enabling you to retrieve your end tackle.

There are plain round weights which are intended for minimal movement in shallow water or water with no current or sometimes employed to move your hook and bait with current and rest/fall into fish holding areas such as gullies, sand banks or holes.

Watch/clock weights are flat round weights which sit on the sand and are a kind of cross between the 2 mentioned above.

There are others but those are the top 3 as it were.

Beads

Beads are used as attractors for fish on line above the hook/s, are various sizes and colours some are luminous for night fishing. Caveat Sequins can also be used as attractors.

There other roles is to act as an impact absorber and anti rubbing device form other rig components and knots i.e. a bead is placed between a weight and swivel so rather than the weights impacting directly on the swivel and knot it hits the bead minimising damage.

Trace

Trace is the bit of line from swivel to hook, it is usually (but not always) of a lower breaking strain than the main line or leader, reasoning is if your hook is snagged on a rope/structure and you have to snap your line the line will snap at the weakest point so by having weaker trace you will hopefully only loose a hook and a bit of line rather than a whole rig saving time in re making of a rig and more importantly money.

Swivels

Are a 2 holed or sometimes 3 holed rolling anti tangle device deployed in just about all forms of sea fishing in various ways.

Crimps

Used for making multi hooked rigs.

Lead Links

Links of twisty metal that allow quick changing of weights.

Lead Lifts.

Great bit of money saving kit. These are flat pieces of plastic which fix between your rig end and weight used when fishing rock/snaggy ground when you reel in the lead lift does what it say on the tin and lifts the weight up practically vertically and skims the top of the water saving you huge tackle losses.

D Vice

Like a tube weight where soft squigy bait can be placed in the tube and cast out with out coming off the hook, when it hits the water it releases the baited hook so the fish can eat it. GREAT invention, also acts as a lead lift.

Knots, usually for joining line to an eye (hook/Swivel etc) I personally use a uni knot or Grinner, for main line to leader an overhand/granny knot in the leader combined with a blood knot to the main line, stop knots for float fishing a stop knot with 8lb powergum which is a red stretchy line (or just std line will suffice), braid to mono Albright knot. All can be found here http://www.animatedknots.com stop knot here http://www.pacgb.co.uk/tips/stopknot.html
Remember to lubricate (spit) on line before tightening or line will be weakened through heat/abrasion.

Fishing styles

Float fishing – like it says on the tin, a baited hook is suspended at a pre determined adjustable length under the water. This style attracts predatory fish.

Bottom (Ledgering) fishing – where bait is placed on the bottom of the sea bed. This style attracts all species.

Spinning or Plugging – Moving bait again for predatory fish.

Float fishing.

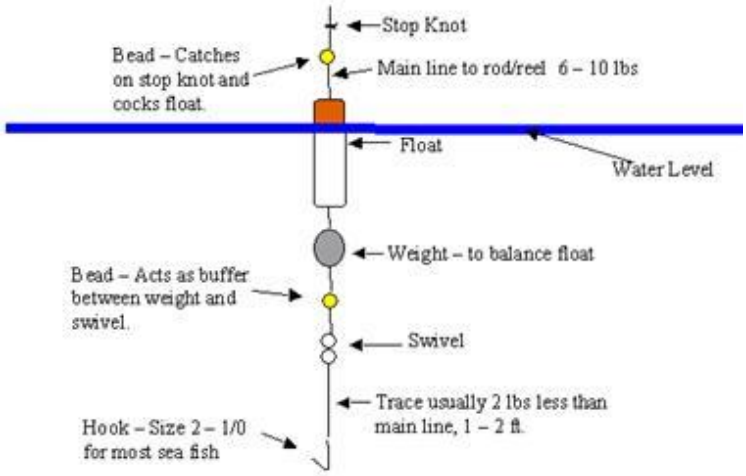
This is a popular starting point for many an angler as it is relatively easy to catch the abundance of Mackerel we have in the UK (South West anyway).

You will need.

Rod, spinning or float rod, small fixed spool reel, line, trace, beads, swivel, hook, weight.

Bait up your hook with slivers of mackerel, Squid, or Live Prawn around rocks or live Sand eel around sandy areas.

Make your set up like this.



Ensure that you vary the depth you are fishing at by adjusting the position of your stop knot, start approx 8 ft and lengthen or shorten as necessary. Watch other anglers who are catching and see how deep they fish and adjust accordingly.

Bottom/Ledger fishing.

Just about all fish can be caught by bottom fishing, and there are many many different variations of Rigs (setups), which vary generally from one to 3 hooks Pennel, The basic Running Ledger, Pulley, 1 up 1 down, paternosters are examples and can be found on many fishing websites, try a Google search "sea fishing rigs" for plenty. Bait clips can be used to increase aerodynamics and keep your bait on the hook/s, shearing/baiting elastic is also ideal for keeping softer baits on the hook.

I personally use a 2 – 3 hook paternoster when general fishing switching to a pulley rig for larger species.

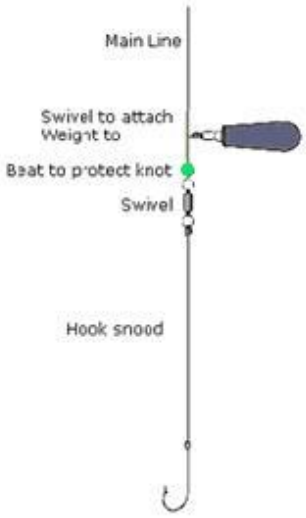
One hook baited with Peeler crab (when available) another with worm tipped with mackerel, and if using 3 another of any bait or bait combination I have.

General bait in my personal order of preference are Peeler, Ragworm, Lug worm, , Sandeel, Squid/Mackerel, try different combinations on hooks and see what the fish are going for then switch about, no point in putting out costly peeler if the fish are only interested in cheapo Mackerel!!

Top Tip – You do not have to cast miles to catch fish; you would be surprised what can be caught 10 feet from the shore.

A few bits for your tackle arsenal are crimps to make a stop/trap for hooklengths (snoods), bait clips, lead links (quick changing of leads), weights of various styles some have prongs to grip the sea bed, others are designed to roll about the sea bed and find gulleys/sandbars which are fish holding areas.

Here are a couple of rigs for info



Running
Ledger

2 Hook
Paternoster

Plugging/Spinning.

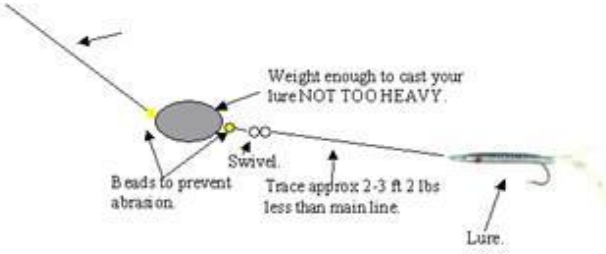
Spinning and plugging is the act of using an artificial lure/spinner/plug to catch predatory fish. The object is to cast and retrieve your lure to ensnare a fish. If you are not catching vary retrieval speeds, this will alter depth, also try combinations of quick and slow retrieving, jerking your rod can also make the lure jerk in a fishy way.

In all instances walk/stalk up and down a beach/rocky area to enhance your catch. If unable to walk stalk cast about in a semi circle to find fish holding areas.

There are many many different types of lure on the market, beware some are designed to catch anglers over fish!!!!!

Rubber eels.

These are sandeel type lures of varying sizes/lengths and are cast with the aid of a weight and retrieved. Use white for Bass.



Spinners

Lots of styles of spinners are available and generally made of metal treat the same as a rubber eel, however if the spinner you are using does not require

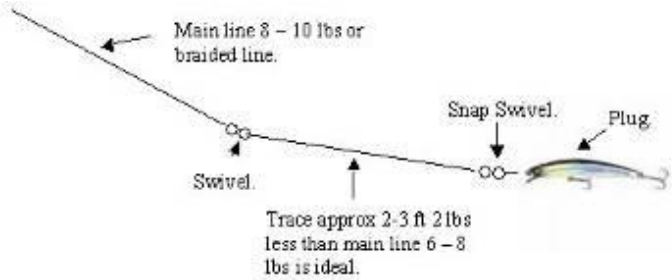
a weight treat as per Plug setup below.

Plugs

The most realistic type of lure is the plug, usually made from Balsa wood; these realistic fish like lures can be jointed or singular in construction. They also have a vane on the front below the mouth this makes the lure descend when reeled in and when winding stops the plug floats to the surface. Some have a flat or curved mouth area, these are called poppers and when the rod is flicked the popper spits water to attract fish.

Watch how your plug works/swims in the water and hone your retrieval to make it look real, these can look uncannily fish like. Add a snap swivel to the end of your trace; this will enable you to change lures quicker.

DVDs, television shows and books show expert anglers catching lots of big fish on plugs after 100 trips at all hours of the day and night I caught none on the 20 or so expensive plugs I had in my collection, so I sold them!!



Happy fishing!

Bamboo Fishing Spear by Mistwalker

A friend gave me some new material to play with yesterday. I can get as much as I want so I started thinking about things I can make with it. I am going to make some blinds and stuff for sunshades later but I started making this last night, did this in about thirty minutes just sitting on the porch. Then I whittled on it some more today and wrapped it. I know there is a ways to go yet thinning down the prongs, but it does show the two knives

make a good team. However I think these are only legal for saltwater fishing in most places…but for survival purposes…

All I used was these…

A bamboo stalk, some braided cord, and then whittled a stick to fit inside and spread the tines.

It can serve well as a defensive weapon or as a hunting spear simply sharpened like this.

I split one end on the stalk in quarters down to the second joint where I had tied the braided cord tightly around it, and then started whittling on the tines with the little BK13. The 13 worked really well for this

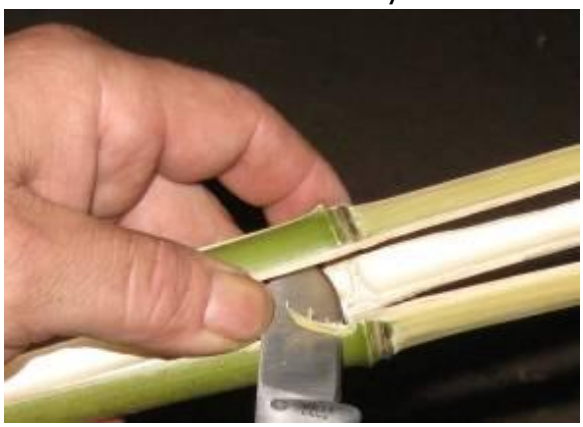
Now I've got the cord wrapped, but I think I may whittle on the spreader stick some more and re-wrap it later.

It is about 8 feet long and I have been playing with some larger pieces as well.

I finished it tonight. Hopefully I'll get to try it out soon. I cut a joint out of another stalk and made it into a ring to use as a spreader and tine support.

I cut flat spots on it for the tines to sit on and notches inside to hold the string in place.

Next I whittled some notches in the tines to hold the string in place. And then put the ring in between the tines and tied it in place. Now I'm wishing I was back in Florida for a day or three.



Chapter 4 Butchering

Pig in a day the Rhomboid way

Okay first things first. The main lesson I learned this weekend is: don't try to butcher a pig when it's tipping down with rain. It is an outdoor activity (well it is if you live in a 2-up 2-down, certainly), and best suited to cool but dry conditions.

Which I didn't have. Tipping it down was the order of the day, but a dead pig waits for no man, unless he has a really big fridge, so it was out with the big Meccano set and building a quick butcher's shelter:

which leads on to lesson 2 - cable-tying a tarp over even the strongest of structures almost guarantees the onset of gale-force winds.

But anyway, enough whingeing. Basic preps for the butchering and processing involved: making sure enough supplies of butcher's string, salt, saltpetre, freezer bags etc. Cleaning and sterilising all worksurfaces, and as many buckets, tupperware boxes etc as possible, which will still not be quite enough. Preparing brines a day in advance (they need to be cooled to about 3 degrees for use:

In the pot on the left is a basic salt brine of salt, saltpetre and water and on the right a Wiltshire cure of beer, treacle, salt, saltpetre, pepper and juniper berries. I had lent my big stockpot out a while ago and not got it back yet, which was a big mistake (more of which later) as bothe of these pots have only a 6 litre capacity - I had to do 2 pots of the Witshire cure and 4 of the basic brine. This is why it was best done the day before.

Tools:

(not pictured - the most important one - Butcher's diamond sharpening steel)
everything sharpened the day before. The Shinkansen ceramic sharpener at left wasa new acquisition and a revelation - restored the Global knives to a sharpness I had forgotten - others will know more about this than me but I understand the weird bevel on Global knives won't work with normal steels.

NB: another lesson here. Neither the cleaver or the bone saw I was using here were really big enough for the job. Both worked and got the job done, but it would have been easier, quicker and by association safer with bigger tools.

Enter Miss Piggy:

I had her cut in half at the slaughterhouse, because it's a pig of a job(forgive the pun) if you don't have somewhere sturdy to hang the beast from, and would have been a nightmare with my mini-bone saw. I also had the skin scalded and scraped at the same time, because it's a horrible job, best avoided.

(NB from here on, I have interspersed pics form each side, rather than go for straight chronological order, on the basis that the cuts were the same for both halves and are better illustrated by combining both sets)

First step is to tidy out any stray bits of unpleasantness inside the carcass (these are best given to the dog or cat)

Cut out the tail and remove the offal.

Then remove the head, cutting straight across at the top of the neck:

Removing the back leg: make an incision straight across about 2 fingers in from the exposed end of the (? I presume) hip bone:

cut through the meat until you reach the bone, then swap to the bone saw (using a bigger one than pictured here):

Now you have a ham! Hurray!

Separate horizontally - removing the top half - loin, chump, etc from the belly and foreleg:

At the back end, make a cut just below the eye of the chop:

score a line right down the middle to the neck end end, then start cutting down this line.

as soon as you hit the ribs, switch to the bone saw. It was here that I really regretted not having a bigger saw to hand. You do not want to be using a cleaver here though (or an axe, Red!) or you will end up with bone splinters in your meat.

Gently saw through the ribs and then separate the remainder of the meat and skin with the knife (you will be re-sharpening at least at each step by now)

From the upper (loin) half - the back piece can be removed - this is the chump end (i did this on one half and left it on the other.

which can be chopped up for ... chops!

next, count 4 ribs in from the front end , and make an incision straight across

again, as soon as you hit bone, switch to the saw (if you have a small bone saw like this one, you will be developing blisters by this stage, which will become significant later during the brining and salting stages.)

this gives you a good spare-rib joint which will feed an army. I kept one of these and chopped the other up for salami meat and to use the back fat.

next thing was separating the ribs from the loin. This looks harder than it is. Sharp knife. follow the bone down, follow it round the spine. Done.

Giving a nice piece of loin to be tied and rack of ribs for barbecue. These pieces went straight into freezer. Loin was cut into sensible pieces for 2 adults and one capacious toddler.

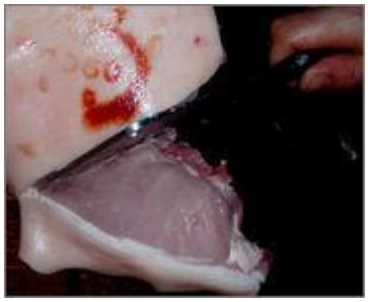
I then separated the front leg from the belly (My photographer had absconded by this point I'm afraid), then cut off the front section (thick end) from the belly. one side of which I froze as a roasting joint. the other side I boned out for rillons (cooked and preserved in jars in own fat - will post instructions separately if demand)

Both front legs were boned out and chopped up for sausage. Both bellies were put aside for bacon.

Part 2: Processing.

I'm afraid the pictures get fewer and further between her - i was taking my own pictures by this stage and as time wore on and the processing failed to seem to have an end I confess to feeling a little less enthusiasm... however:

(incidentally, the slight bluish tinge to many of the pictures is due to the light filtering through the blue tarp overhead - it does make the meat look somewhat grey in many pictures, i realise now)



Hind leg 1 - trotter removed and chucked in a bucket of brine with the tail - of which more later.

Da contender! weighing in at 16 and a bit pounds - a fine back leg, which I intended to air dry as a prosciutto-style ham. Big conundrum here - whether to leave the bone in or not... In an ideal world, leaving it in adds to the flavour and does not involve the hassle of boning it out... on the other hand, leaving it in greatly increases the risk of something going wrong and it going off... which we could ill afford.. so out comes the bone...:

And a wise decision it turned out to be as this pocket of air and blood halfway up the leg bone would have been a prime bacteria breeding ground...

anyway, continuing to nick round the edges of the bone(s) at the edges closest to the surface, one eventually removes the whole leg mechanism. The ham is now only a mere 14 lbs.

This was then sewed back up again (ideally with a neat and tight blanket stitch, but thankfully the picture does not show the nasty ragged mess of stitches I inflicted on the poor ham, with the cavity packed with salt/saltpetre mix to cure from the inside as well.

The whole of the outside is rubbed with salt and then placed in a bucket/box/other container (as long as it it's not made of metal) on a bed

of an inch+ of salt, and packed with salt. A weight of min 1 1/2 times that of the ham is placed on top.

The other leg, I don't have pictures of, I'm afraid. - This one I wet cured for boiling/baking hams. As there are only 2 adults and 1 and a bump children in our household, we felt a 9 kilo ham was a bit OTT, so i separated it into a traditional leg gammon, a slipper gammon (having despatched Mrs R to the butcher with a picture of a pig's arse to get a sketch confirming exactly where to cut), and a corner gammon. Somehow I managed to end up with a fourth mystery gammon, but I consider that a bonus. The butcher was so amused he has invited me to come and join in a pig-jointing sessions to be instructed free of charge in how to do it properly. Which is a right result. I am sure i will be the butt of all humour (they already think I'm mad), but free expert tuition is never to be sneezed at.

Anyway, these hams were placed first in a bucket of basic salt brine for 6 hours, then in the bucket of Wiltshire cure, where they will reside for a duration of three days per kilo, before hanging and keeping. before use they will be soaked for two days.

The forelegs: these can be used for gammon, but I chose to bone them out for sausages.

This is a very easy bit, although I was quite tired by this point... the skin is removed and the lean meat and fatty parts separated (NB although not pictured, when I separated out the spare rib joint and other leg, both of these containers were full)

Okay, we're getting into waste not want not now, but we fall into the former category (emphasis on gory). So we come to ...

This is dead easy (although not with a tiny bone saw -see earlier admonitions!) - saw it in half down the middle:

scoop out the brain and reserve for later - Butcher's perk - coated in breadcrumbs and butter and fried till crisp on the outside but still creamy on the inside.

The eyes are dug out - I have found no use for these, but, apart from the skin off the forelegs this is all that went in the bin. The cat ate any stray odds and ends, my sister's dog crunched up the remaining bones, everything else is in the freezer or in salt/brine etc... this may disgust some of you and inspire others. To me it is one of the best things about butchering your own pig - nose to tail usage. Nothing wasted but the oink

(and the eyeballs).

The split head is chucked in a bucket of brine with the tail, trotters and ears (removal of these not pictured)

normally I would keep the trotters and ears for dishes in their own right, but freezer space was at a premium and I already have a few of each, so they went into the general Hurky/haggis/Brawn mix.

Everyone knows what haggis is. Brawn is usually head parts and other leftovers (trotters etc) Hurky is an Eastern European sausage concoction made of pig entrails and fat.
I decided I would make something that combined all three, utilising all the bits I had to hand.

Sadly the abattoir did not let me have the lungs or heart (sold them off for ca t food I would guess, after I had paid for them. Abattoirs are not always scrupulously honest, especially if you are not a regular customer)

Anyway, I boiled down the head, tail, trotters, bones from the legs etc for about 3 hours, in the presence of 2kg onions, about the same of carrots, a bunch of celery, parsley, bay etc. (Again this is where the big stockpot would have been useful - I had to do it in two pots in two batches and it took till 2AM while I wanted to sleep.) Don't have pictures of this stage but it wasn't pretty.

Then, once cooled, the soft bits were separated from the bone - anything that isn't bone is fair game here - skin, fat, cartilage, meat, random tissue and jelly, it's all good. there is a lot of this. The liquid part is strained off and sets to a thick jelly:

At which point, enter the liver, modelled here by the lovely Mrs R:

this is poached until it looks like this:

The whole lot is put through the mincer on a coarse setting, then mixed with salt, spices and either boiled rice or oatmeal (which has been mixed with its own volume of water a day previously)

This was then fed through the sausage machine to produce long strings of Hurky-haggis in Slovak (rice) and Scots (oatmeal) variety.

These were twisted off into lengths (a knack in itself which requires atutorial of its own) and poached for about ten minutes a time, to allow keeping. Once poached, they have doubled in volume or more.

as can be seen by the water in the pan, a couple will burst in this process, but if you have packed the casings properly, losses should be minimal (we lost three out of 120-odd)

Next: sausages - the bucket of lean meat is minced

Sorry pics becoming fewer and further between at this stage - v. late at night and tired. Sausage meat mixed with various spices, apples, wood-shaving etc to make different mixes. This all fed through mincer one more time.

Likewise salami meat - the lean meat from the spare rib joint, which is then mixed with diced back fat.

Ending up with sausages:

GTM, the pig was 2 quid a kilo dead weight, which worked out to be 130 pounds. Given that the only bit that went in the bin was the eyeballs and a bit of skin , and even the dog and cat portions were probably not more than about 6 kg, that was pretty good value. Once made up into finished product, I have two half-height freezers ful, plus salamis hanging and hams and bacon sides, so damn good value really. Plus from survival perspective, the hams and bacons, depending on how long I leave them in their cures will keep for anywhere from 3 months to a year (I am happy to debate the science of this with anyone who doubts it).

Salamis by Rhomboid

I put aside the meat from one of the spare rib joints for salami - unlike sausage meat, which can be quite fatty, the salami meat should be pretty lean, and then diced back fat is added separately. So you get a good distribution of pieces.

I decided to go for two types of salami this time - a regular French type with peppercorns in it, and a Chorizo.

I started with 1.5 kg of meat in each mix, to which I added about 400g of back fat cut to peas-sized pieces.

The key thing with salami is the quantity of salt, which is what is going to preserve the thing. It should be exactly 2% of the total weight of meat and fat combined. So I added 40g of salt to each batch. (this sounds a lot, but it's the preserving agent as i said)

To the French mix (at left) I then added 3 cloves of garlic, mashed, and about 400ml of elderberry wine and a good shake of cracked black peppercorns.

To the Chorizo (at right) I added four or five large tablespoons of smoked paprika, a good shake of crushed fennel seeds, 6 cloves of garlic and 400ml of rioja (it was a good excuse to buy a bottle of wine

That was it on the mixtures. apart from mixing them together well. Some people add a teaspoon of Acidophilus per kilo to encourage the correct mould to bloom on the outside. I don't because I don't find it necessary. I generally hang the salamis close to some more mature ones which already have a mould growth and it transfers itself quite naturally. If in doubt it can be helped along by transferring a little by fingernail.

Traditionally you are supposed to use ox-runners for salamis the will be nice and fat. Again I don't, because the hog casings I use for my sausage

are IMO plenty thick enough, and I have a huge amount of them already (one set of pig intestines goes a mighty long way).

Afraid this is the only picture of the sausage-machine in action - the casing being loaded on. It was v late by this point and the photography went rather by the wayside. Not much to say about the pumping part really, other than it is important to tie off the casing with a double strength knot at each end - this involves tying a half-knot across the end of the casing, then flooding the casing back over the knot and tying a full knot over that. Also, in order to do this, you tie off each salami individually rather than pumping out a whole coil and tying them afterwards.

The salamis are then hung in a cool, dry place with plenty of air circulation. The temp should not exceed about 12-13 C. They should not be in contact with each other or the wall etc.
Depending on conditions and personal preference for hardness, they will take anywhere from 5-10 weeks to be ready. The Chorizo can be sliced and cooked after only a week or so, or left longer if eaten raw.

these are the Chorizos hanging. The Arctic camouflaged salamis hanging behind are some venison salamis I made about 6 weeks ago - you can see the mould growth on the skin. This is not harmful and actually serves to protect it. Sometimes you can get really odd shades of green and orange growing on them.

This is one of the French pepper salamis

although it looks almost as orangey as the chorizo in this picture, not sure why.

As for keeping... They will keep almost indefinitely if left hanging, but they will continue to get harder until eventually they become quite inedible (It did an experiment with this last year and after 7 months a salami was like a piece of teak. No amount of chewing yielded anything but a sore jaw, although it would have made a good cosh.

When they are at the level of firmness you prefer, you should take them down and rub off the mould with a piece of scrunched up paper, then roll them in wood ash. This will arrest (or severely slow down the drying process). Wrapped loosely in greaseproof paper and kept in fridge or cold larder, they will keep for another month this way.

These ones would definitely last until March or so by this reckoning, which is pretty much the idea - last through the winter. In reality I doubt these particular ones will last anywhere near that long because they will be eaten long before that point.

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Acidophilus is in some health food shops and also chemists - usually in powdered form, sometimes in tablets which you have to grind up with pestle and mortar (or maglite in a tin bowl depending on where you are).

Back fat is indeed exactly what it sounds like. In fact it doesn't have to be from the back specifically could be belly or anywhere really, as long as it is the nice firm subcutaneous stuff with no gristle - as opposed to rendered fat or lard or flare fat from inside the pig.

Spare rib is also sold as shoulder sometimes. The front leg is also good meat to use and generally cheaper (also known as 'Hand') - just trim off any excess fat and sinew. The hand is often a very good value piece of pork.

Casing-wise, as I said, i use hog casings because I have so damn many of the things and can't justify buying ox-runners just for salami. Maybe when I run out of hog casings I'll get some but one pig worth of guts goes a hell of a long way...

Ox-runners are what is traditionally used for salamis - these are cow's intestines, you buy them salted then rinse them out and wash them through for use. Salamis contract a hell of a lot during the drying process and using ox-runners will end up about 2 1/2 inches in diameter. If you want real whoppers like you get from Spain, you would need to use Beef middles - basically a bit from further up the intestine. These will end up 4 inches or so. I have never actually tried using the real big ones - I assume they would take correspondingly longer to mature, and I would be more worried about the risk of going off.

The standard pig casings - if your butcher makes sausages they will probably sell you 20metres or so for about 50p.
Ox-runners you can order from here:
http://www.sausagemaking.org/acatalog/Ox_runners.html
I have not ordered anything from this place but I have heard good things about them. They have all the other bits you might need as well. No Beef middles though... for those you'd have to go here:
http://www.naturalcasingco.co.uk/pricelist.pdf

I have seen places that do artificial casings 'for vegetarians' - I can understand veggie-sausage, but can't quite work out what a veggie salami could be...

smoked paprika, which gives the whole salami a smoked taste is excellent stuff - used to be very difficult to find - just in Hungarian delis etc but now they do it in Tesco - own brand at a quid twenty a jar. Wonderful stuff. Obviously you can doctor the mix with chilli if you want a hotter chorizo - Dried chilli flakes are good for this.

Lastly, if you don't have a sausage-stuffer, you can make them very simply using a funnel and wooden spoon handle. It is much more time-consuming obviously and you need a funnel with a wide enough nozzle, but it works fine. I used to do it this way for ages until I got a sausage pump (I bought mine for under 20 quid in Slovakia - here I think they are more like a hundred and thirty)

The brine mix I'm not sure where I got the quantities - having been doing that ratio for ages for all brine solutions - I would imagine the River Cottage Meat book would have it, and more. The RC forum has a good pig-related page too.

The sausage mixes, beyond the requirement for the 2% salt in the salami, and the basic 10% rusk/bulking agent in the sausage meat are all pretty much made up as I go along. That is the fun bit of doing a large batch of sausages - you can just try whatever takes your fancy - I keep a frying pan going while I'm mixing and just drop little bits in every now and then until I think the taste is about right, then move on to a new batch. Some are fairly classic - sage and thyme for example, or apple & cider (again a good excuse to open a bottle). Others were more experimental - the spicy Indian mix for example. I usually chuck in a bit of sugar for caramelisation as well, but it's just foody playtime really.

Bacon and ham and the question of salt

by **Rhomboid**

Okay, continuing from where we left off, the back legs of the pig had been put aside for hams.
One of these was boned out and packed in salt with a large weight on top of it (1.5 times the weight of the ham minimum)

The other leg was divided into a corner gammon, a slipper gammon, a traditional leg gammon and, another bit which I ended up with despite following the cutting guide as accurately as possibly (this was drawn on a post-it note by my butcher)

These went into a bucket of plain salt water brine for a few hours, then were transferred to the Wiltshire cure of black treacle, beer and salt.

A 2-litre bottle filled with water was placed on top of the hams to weigh them down (otherwise they would bob to the surface due to the salinity of the water.)

There is debate as to how long the hams should stay in the cure, and partly it comes down to taste, partly what you intend doing with the meat. A lot of the time nowadays, with modern refrigeration etc meat/fish is cured/smoked/salted etc for reasons of imparting taste to it as opposed to preserving it, and consequently, much shorter curing times can be used. In days of yore, the purpose of the curing and/or smoking was to improve the keeping qualities of the meat and consequently curing/smoking times were much longer. This produces a meat which is obviously drier, but also saltier, often unacceptably so for modern tastes.

That said, my motivation in this instance was the latter - I want to be able to keep these hams and bacons throughout the winter without recourse to fridge or freezer. In terms of the usefulness of the technique in survival terms I would imagine long-term storage takes precedent again.

Also, my bacon is primarily intended for use in cooking (In soups and stews etc) rather as breakfast rashers, so the saltiness is less of an issue, and besides, I find that soaking the meat before use almost always reduces the salinity to acceptable levels. We shall return to this.

Anyway, the general rule of thumb is about 3 days/kilo for hams in wet cure. 4 days if you want a stronger cure, as little as a day-and-a half if you intend cooking it straight away. I made a major miscalculation at this point

however... My hams were about 6 kg or so, therefore requiring 18 days, give or take, in the cure. What I didn't take into account was that I had cut the ham into three separate pieces (and ended up with four), and the equation is calculated on surface area to volume ratio... so I should have calculated each piece separately and they should have had 3-5 days respectively....

This only occurred to me after a good 9 days had already passed, so it was with some trepidation that I approached the curing bucket...

The hams emerge from the bucket (weight bottle behind).

The hams were rinsed off at this stage. They have reduced in size by a good 10% or so.

I was a little alarmed by this point as they resemble frostbitten limbs. They are black (the flash in the pic does not show this very well.) however, shaving a fraction off one piece reveals pinker meat within...

The hams are wrapped in muslin and hung up outside to air for a few days.

I have taken one of the smaller pieces (which should be the most over-cured) to test. Normally I would soak a gammon for 12-24 hours. Given the situation here I am soaking it for 48 hours.

After only an hour and a half, a lot of of colour is coming out.

After two days, and a water change midway, the colour is looking a lot less scary. I am cooking this as I type, so will report back on how it turned out.

Meanwhile the bacon...

The two bellies were placed in a large plastic box (never use metal), and rubbed vigorously with a dry cure mix made of 1.5kg salt, 700g brown sugar, 5 tbs saltpetre, peppercorns, juniper berries and (added after a few days) crushed bay leaves.

Almost immediately, the salt starts to draw moisture out of the bellies. After 24 hours there is a good amount of it sloshing around in the bottom of the box. This is poured away, and I generally put the wet salt into a bowl to dry out and reuse (in the curing process, I hasten to add, not on the table!). More of the cure mix is rubbed into the bellies and they are restacked and left for another day. Again there is debate about how many days to keep doing this, and how much salt to use (I would have thought the one was dependent on the other). For reasons passim, I was going for longer curing for longer keeping.

Incidentally, it is worth noting here: the ribs have been left on the bellies, unlike bacon as you see it in its usual form. This is again with long-term keeping in mind - the fewer exposed surfaces, the less chance of spoiling or flies etc - with the skin on the other side, the only parts of the actual meat exposed to air are the edges. As I use it, I cut off a chunk and bone it then cut it up. The bones are very good for stock or soup.

After however many days, the bellies are rinsed off, and the meat patted dry with kitchen towels. The whole side has a stiff leathery feel to it now.

Then hung outside to mature for a while. Ideally I would leave them a good couple of weeks at this point, but they are fine to eat after a couple of days. So I cut off a test piece this morning just to make sure it was okay.

Again I popped in a bowl of water to soak for a couple of hours just to get rid of the worst of the saltiness. The colour is very good (thanks to the saltpetre). I sliced a couple of rashers and fried them in a breakfast style, and it wasn't at all bad. Perhaps a little bit more soaking would be needed to make it ideal bacon& egg material, but it wasn't far off.

Sadly my plans for a smoker have not come together in time for this animal, but I am determined to build one for next time.

Just a quick update. The gammon was delicious.
it had soaked for 48 hours with one water change. This was the smallest piece, weighing in around 750g.

I boiled it for half an hour, took off the skin and scored the fat and glazed with a simple English mustard powder/brown sugar/ double cream and cinnamon glaze then baked it for another 35-40 minutes.

I was initially a bit worried as the outer exposed pieces looked quite dry and brown. However, cutting in to it, it was beautifully moist and a really good pink colour. The meat was very tender and sweet - the treacle/beer cure lent a very subtle taste - not at all strident or overpowering - just there if you thought about it, although the sweetness of the glaze might have masked it little.

Which is a happy result, and also goes to prove that with proper soaking you can push the curing times quite a long way - Going by the general equation this piece should have had three days max, and it actually had nine. Which should mean that it should keep for quite some time.
I may as an experiment keep the next smallest one, which is also around the kilo mark to see how long it will go - say three months? four?

There's more than one way to skin a squirrel

This is a subject that came up over at INEBG, so I got a couple of squirrels this morning and thought I'd show the methods I use for skinning them. I decided it was probably more useful to post it here and put a link over there than the other way around, plus didn't want to offend the sensibilities of any of their more delicately minded members.

Before I start, a slight disclaimer - I was photographing and skinning on my own this time which slightly defeated the object of showing how easy it is to skin a squirrel - if you are trying to take pictures with one hand and skin with the other it is difficult. Hence some of the pics are not as good as they might be.

Disclaimer number two: The knife I am using here is way too big for the job at hand. A specialised skinning knife or any sharp knife with a blade about 3 inches long would be far better. However i thought I would just continue in my series of cutting up animals with inappropriate tools.

Anyway:

Step one - take two squirrels.

The eagle-eyed among will notice the somewhat bedraggled state of the one on the left. He dragged me into a lake during the last stages of our battle to the death. It is a squirrel though, i assure you. Just goes to show how rat-like they look when you take away the fluff-factor. They are both fresh.

TECHNIQUE ONE:

This is pretty much the same way you would do a rabbit or whatever. First pinch a bit of skin from the lower belly between thumb and forefinger and make a small nick. This ensures you don't pierce any of the guts or organs while slicing open.

Then put the tip of the knife in this hole and slice cleanly up the belly toward the chest cavity pull out all the guts and put to one side. You could separate out the useful bits (liver, kidneys, heart,) from the rest. if you were hungry you could eat these. I give them to the cat. You might also open the stomach and have a look at what Mr.Nutkin has been eating. I am frequently asked how one can tell whether wild animals are safe to eat in terms of what they may have eaten. This is the answer. If the stomach contains beech mast, acorns etc, he should be fine. If it is full of dirty syringes, polonium 112 and McDonalds fries, he is not worth the risk.

At this stage i remove the tail (which you should put aside if intending to use for paintbrushes, false moustache, Lambretta aerial decoration or blind duster, or dispose of as preferred)

and the feet, which makes the next stage a lot easier.

Then its just a matter of peeling back the skin over the legs - a bit like turning a glove inside out

Then pop the leg out of the skin at the joint where the foot has been removed.

repeat the process with the other leg

Then, with the tail already removed, ease the skin up over the back and continue to 'peel the glove' forward. It should come quite smoothly but if there is any bit which sticks, simply use the tip of the knife blade to nick the skin away from the meat.

As I only intend to use the back legs and saddle of the squirrel, there is no point in skinning any further than the start of the chest, so I simply cut it off here:

et voila, squirrel numero uno, fertig und kochbereit, to mix a few languages.

Technique Two:

This is my preferred method. it is easier, quicker and cleaner. Place the squirrel on its front.

Make a pair of cuts in a cross shape along the centre of the back. Try not to cut into the meat (as I have done slightly here)

Now start pulling the skin down as before. some how undressing the animal from back-to-front in this way, as opposed to front-to-back, is much easier. Start with the back legs.

Cut off the tail from the inside as you come around it:

Working this way round makes it much easier to skin the whole beast so if you want to, just pull the 'trouser' straight down and over the foot.

Carry on as before working up to the head end. This time I have kept the animal whole for purposes of illustration. However I can't imagine any conceivable reason why you might want to skin the head itself,(although have done with rabbit and hare - for certain French recipes...) so I just cut the pelt off there.

And here he is - Mr Nutkin in the nude. he still needs paunching of course. But that is the work of but a moment, especially now all the fur is out of the way, and we have two sections of squirrel. A quick rinse under the cold tap and they're ready

And here are the final results in the kitchen:

Plus a bumper Sunday lunch for the cat (who will be made up with this and eat every last morsel

and a couple more dusters /paintbrushes/ false moustaches for the collection:

Going back to my original boast on INEBG, both of them took me considerably longer than thirty seconds, in fact, but that was mainly due to

trying to take pictures at the same time and using a stupidly long knife. The whole operation took less than 5 minutes however.

How to joint a rabbit for the pot

by **Deerstalker**

Go to the last photo on the "How to skin a rabbit" thread and I'll start there.

Assemble all the tools you may need before hand. I use only 2 knives now as I cut around the joints, but that comes with experience. A heavy knife or cleaver may be useful to have.

Start by removing the front legs. There are no joints to deal with, just keep a sharp knife as close as possible to the ribs.

Looking at the above photo, cut the flaps of muscle (which cover the gut) away, from tight to the bottom rib, along where it joins the saddle, to between the legs. See below.

Sever the back bone just behind where the last rib meets it.

Removing the back legs is probably the hardest part. Use a very sharp knife and cut in just below where the saddle ends. Keep the knife very close to the hip bone, and when all the meat is cut away, the leg should just twist off (when both legs are done there should be very little meat on the hips).

The fully jointed rabbit. Although the ribs and hips have little meat on them, roasted they make great stock.

The saddle has been cut in half. And there you have it.

How to skin a rabbit *by* ***Deerstalker***

There are numerous ways to do this depending on the tools you have to hand and what you intend to do with the pelt. Try this....one young rabbit shot cleanly behind the left ear.

Paunch your rabbit and remove each leg at the joint a cleaver or secateurs would be fine for this.

Seperate the muscle covering the gut from the skin (it comes away quite easily)

Continue until you work your way round to the back.

Then pull the skin over the back legs as if taking off a sock

We'll attend to the tail later.

Pull the skin forwards and ease out each front leg in turn.

Pull the skin forwards exposing the neck.

Then sever the head or skin it if required.

Remove the tail, tail glands and the remains of any organs running through the hips

Wipe over with a hot damp cloth to remove traces of fur, wash and enjoy

How to draw and pluck a pheasant

by **Deerstalker**

In this instance it's a small hen pheasant, that will roast nicely for one, but the process is the same for any bird.

I'm plucking it at the kitchen table since it's too cold outside .First lay the bird on it's back, take a small bunch of breast feathers twixt finger and thumb and "pluck", that is, pull sharply out and away from the direction they would normally lie in.

Don't try to do too much at once or you'll tear the skin. Just keep going till the whole body is done.

Making steady progress go halfway down the neck, do the legs and the tail do care fully, take care not to rip the skin but it will happen here and there.

Doing the wings takes a bit more effort and you might want a pair of pliers

handy to help with the bigger feathers.

You don't have to worry about the wing primaries (the tough, long ones at the end of the wing) if you don't want, just locate the hinge of the wing and cut it off with a pair of shears.

But since I'm doing this for the camera, I'm doing it as you might want to with a bigger bird.

Next cut the head off.

Use a finger to seperate the skin from the neck, before sliding the skin back and cutting through the inner neck (bone and meat), close as possible to the body. Keep this for stock.

Next, to take the feet off, cut round the skin at the bottom of the "breeks",

snap the joint

Then pull hard while holding on to the thigh, and you should be able to pull the tendons out.

You should now have a bird that looks like this:

This is where it is worth taking your time and plenty of care. The idea is to cut around the vent without opening it up.Using a small, narrow bladed knife, cut carefully and close to the vent.

Try not to cut in too deep as if you open this end of the digestive tract you'll get all the stinky stuff, (not a problem, but it's worth taking a bit of time to try to get it right). Next, you need to pop a finger inside and into the birds cavity and then "draw" the innards out, as intact as possible.

This will be followed by the other organsincluding the gizzard,

All of this goes into the bin, but coming next is the giblets,

Which we want to save for stock, along with the neck.

Back at the other end of the bird now, to remove the crop. This is the first part of the digestive process, and for the curious will contain the last meal enjoyed by the bird. In this case it was wheat.

You are just about done now, take the bird to the sink and run it under a tap, including directing water into the cavity and flushing it out of the neck, also rinse any feather off, then pat it all dry.

Run a finger around inside to make sure you haven’t missed anything, and that’s' it, you should have a dish of giblets:

Now just twist and tuck the wings under the bird, the legs together and the end result should look like this:

Hope this has been a help to those who havn't seen it before, it's as easy as it looks so have a go.

Thanks to my buddy Neil for taking the photos

Brains and Brawn and Bottling

by **Rhomboid**
Bottled Brawn

Many farmers who sell pigs on individually and direct (to hog roasts etc) find they have heads to spare – most customers simply don't want them. If you ask nicely, you can get them for free – they only have to dispose of them otherwise. The downside to this is you can find yourself with half a dozen pig heads which you need to deal with quickly and store sensibly. If you have a spare chest freezer completely empty, no problem. If not, what to do?

Well how about making some bottled brawn?

Pigs in Buckets!
Wherever you look it is bad news for Miss Piggy. This is the first batch of 3 heads (the most I can process on the stove at a time), split and soaking overnight in a basic brine, together with their associated trotters.

Pigheads, pigheads, roly poly pigheads.
Here are the gang, debrined and scrubbed up a bit. Major nastiness and

stuff has been scraped off but the odd bristle and eyelashes and so, can stay. They will all add to the flavour.

A bucket of trotters.

Curiously this is the only tail from all of the animals. A communal tail.

Excuse me, is this part of your brain? This must have dropped out along the way.

Pig head internal cross section.
The soaking in brine has washed away blood and gunk and so on so this is quite clean and easy to handle.

Space in the stockpots is already at a premium though, so the split heads are divided at the jaw to fit easier in the pot..

Top and bottom half of one side. You can see there are quite decent amounts of meat around the jaw muscles.

The ears have been cut off to save space as well. Sometimes I keep a few ears to eat on their own but this time they are going in with the mix. And before that they need cleaning. There is almost no part of a pig that you can’t eat, but I draw the line at porcine earwax. Dried it might make excellent fire-lighting material, but I am not about to experiment with that just yet.

The trotters. This is just the first 3 piggies remember, but nonetheless that is quite a goodly amount of useable meat and stuff.
Again, clean up the trotters of anything unpleasant .

Like this diseased looking mutant toe, for example.

The trotters were all good and meaty, but yielded these four fine hocks, which I am going to put aside and use separately.

Bring the water to the boil for about 10-15 mins and skim off the scummy foam stuff that rises to the surface. Stirring occasionally will release great pockets of this gloop bubbling. Get rid of it.

Once the skimming is over, reduce the heat to a simmer, and chuck in onions, bay leaves

Black peppers, thyme, marjoram (I used oregano this time because I was out of marjoram), cloves, juniper berries.

Having been frozen and defrosted, the brains had lost texture and firmness. I decided not to eat them fried, as we normally do, and tossed them in as well.

Simmer for 3 or 4 hours.

And then remove – this is the contents of the first pan:

The heads have lost a great deal of their structural integrity by this stage, although there are still the odd recognisable bits:

Some of which are strangely poignant, such as this section with an eye, which appears to be crying, and looks spookily human.

But heyho, not time for sentimentality, we've got headcheese to make...

In fact I should have only done two at a time – one whole head and several trotters will have to be done in a second batch. It is best not to over cram the stockpots – you want to be able to move the contents around. If it is packed in too tightly you may get bits stuck against the bottom of the pot which will burn and not only will this impair the flavour, it is a nightmare

trying to get burned-on skin, fat and bone off the bottom of a pan. I know this from bitter experience.
Third head and rest of trotters go in – bit of a miscalculation this. It is now 8PM which means these won't be ready till midnight-ish. Still better that than a burnt snout stuck the bottom of the pot and a scorched taste to the brawn.
The Hocks!

The four hocks I took off the trotters seemed too good to chuck into brawn. There is no shortage of chunky meat content from the cheeks etc so I kept the aside. And am going to make them into the base of a ham and lentil soup. Ideally I'd like to freeze them and use them as and when, but there is no freezer space so I shall make up the ham part of the soup, bottle it in reduced form, then can just open a jar, add lentils and water and presto! Rich soup!
The hocks have soaked in clean water to desalinate whilst batch one was cooking. They go into clean water and boil ten minutes as before, skimming as we go, then simmer with onions, carrots and celery for a couple of hours.
The liquor from the first two pots is combined and set to reduce. This is not only full of all the flavours of the heads, it is also thick with gelatine form the cartilage in the trotters etc. This will provide the jelly in which the brawn sets and the fat in it will form a seal at the top. What is left over can be bottled and used in its own right as a rich thickener for soups, pies etc. Yummy stuff. It is very gelatinous though. Where it splashes on your hands it sets in rubbery scales.

Day two:
The liquor is all combined together and reduced a bit more.

The hocks yielded just under 2lbs of meat, which I have divided into three bottles. The soup stock is reduced down to fill them up and that's one job done.

The brawn stuff has been separated out – a few bits of stray bone chucked away and some of the less palatable bits of gristle, bristle etc – no reason these couldn't be used but I have way more than needed here, so can afford to bit a bit choosy.
Divided up we have about 8lbs of definable meat pieces, about the same of

chunks of fat and 10 ½ lbs of other ‘matter’.

The fat I am putting aside completely. A lot of brawn recipes put all of the fat in the mixture. For the purposes of bottling it however, I want a mainly meat and protein mix, and there is certainly no shortage of fat in the liquor. I render down the fat and manage to get some decent scratchings out of the process as well.

The fat is chopped into small (1” square) chunks and set back on the stove to simmer for a few hours.

The solid bits that are left after the rendering are popped in a roasting tin in the oven and voila... scratching:

A bowlful at a time, the meat and the matter is roughly chopped and mixed together. To be clear, the ‘matter’ is no just cartilage and so on – there is a fair amount of meat on these pieces as well, just not whole chunks. Into each bowlful goes the juice of half a lemon and a handful of chopped fresh parsley.

This is then packed into jars and topped up with the rich liquor. In fact I tend to do a couple of handfuls of brawn, then a couple of ladles of liquor and so on, to ensure that it is mixed all the way to the bottom without airpockets. If you pack all the meats in first then pour in the liquid it doesn't penetrate right the way down.

This lot yielded 12 full jars of brawn. The remaining liquor is strained and also put into bottles. It will make an excellent concentrated stock/soup base – it tastes quite delicious.

And so time to start bottling...

The first five jars go into the canner, with water up to about halfway up the side of the jars. And onto the heat.

Once steam is up, the timer is set for 10 minutes to vent off as much air as possible, then on goes the counterweight and we start to build pressure.

According to the US Dept of Agriculture 'Complete guide to Home Canning and Preserving', which is my bible for pressures and times, 90 mins at 11lbs is what we need here. It is crucial to start timing from when the canner reaches pressure, not when you start heating obviously.

It is a right PITA to use the pressure canner on an electric cooker to be honest. The first half hour or so is a lot of careful monitoring and adjusting the temperature and shifting the canner back and forth as the pressure

glides up to 15 and then up to 13 and so on. I gnash my teeth and think longingly for the day my gas range is finally up and running, but heyho. (Actually since I did this the gas range has at last been installed and my kitchen life is a veritable dream by comparison)

After the allotted time, the canner is taken off the heat, and allowed to cool until pressure is back to 0. Check by removing the counterweight, and always open at arm's length, with face averted.

FWEEP! FWEEP! FWEEP! ALERT!!!
It doesn't come across in a photo, but when the jars come out of the canner, the contents are bubbling. This one wasn't. Cursory inspection reveals that the collar was not correctly threaded. This one is not good.
It needs to cool, be rethreaded and recanned.
The other bottles bubble away and one by one the lids go 'plink' and they are sealed.
There is a visible colour change in the brawn due to the process. I have found this is a sign of a good intermingling of flavours.
Net result:

12 x 1 litre jars brawn
3x 1 litre jars boiled ham in soup concentrate
2 jars concentrated stock
1 jar pure lard
1 bowl pork scratchings

Total cost:
Heads and trotters – free
Onions – used about 1kg – 29p from Lidl
Carrots – used half a dozen – 40 pence maybe
Herbs and spices – bay and thyme from our garden, parsley bought fresh,

bits from jars etc – perhaps £4 together.
6 lemons – £1.30
Total - £5.99
Plus obviously the electricity – which is a reasonable whack as I have had three plates on for 8-12 hours two days running.
The cost of the jars I am discounting – I had them in stock already, they are a reusable resource and will just go back into circulation once empty.
Very little was wasted. From the original heads, this is what was left:

Brawn may not be to everyone's taste I realise. Home-made brawn is an entirely different experience to the slimy cack you might buy in a supermarket however. I wouldn't touch that with a bargepole.

This however tastes very nice. That's not just bias or a taste for the marginal – I mean it is not a challenging acquired taste. Some of the offal-based stuff we make is quite powerfully flavoured and only for the headstrong (hahaha!), whereas this brawn is very delicate tasting and not in any way difficult on the palate. Delicious cold and sliced with a salad or heated up in a frying pan – which obviously melts the jelly into a saucelike consistency – quite super mixed into bubble and squeak and a splendid hangover cure.

Bottled it will keep for a very long time, and is conveniently packaged for barter/gift-giving etc.

The Joy of Sausage Making by Effigy

I know there are some on here who make their own sausages. I thought I would show how I do it.

Home made sausages are just superb. Making them yourself, you know exactly what goes into them. In my case I only use pork shoulder (no manky bits!)

I buy the pork from the local supermarket - whichever one has a special offer on the moment. I use shoulder, though you can use belly as well if you like a fattier sausage.

Chopped up ready for the mincer.

I use an old Kenwood for mincing. Its 50 years old but still gives good service. (Mine was given to me by a friend when she upgraded, though you can get them off Ebay for around £25'ish)

Pork all minced. I'm going to make three different flavoured sausages: Plain pork, Italian and Cumberland. I've weighed out the seasonings, rusk and water.

All three mixed and ready for stuffing. The Pork and Italian has been minced again, I've left the Cumberland coarse.

My new toy - my sausage stuffer 😀I use natural sheep's casings and have threaded them onto the tube (a job I hate!)

Ready to go!

Turn the handle...and sossigies 😀

All done. Pork on the left, Italian in the middle, cumberland on the right.

My skins, flavourings and stuffer were bought from here: http://www.sausagemaking.org/

So there you have it - over three pounds of 'artisan' sausages that work out at just over £1.40/lb. It really is that simple!

Home Cured Bacon

By Effigy

Further to my sausage making activities, I've now had a go at producing my own home-cured bacon.....

I bought the dry cure from here: http://www.sausagemaking.org/acatalog/Traditional_dry_cure_bacon_.html

Edit: following on from Red's request, I've taken a few pictures of the process:

My piece of belly pork. This cost about £12

Nice and meaty, with a nice sheet of ribs.

Off with the ribs and the skin for cooking later.

Cut up into four pieces, roughly 1kg each

Apply the curing salts. I use a ready made all-in-one cure at the rate of 30g per kg

I then Vac pack it. You can wrap it tightly in clingfilm and place in a zip loc bag. It will produce fluids as the salts extract the water out of the meat.
Leave to cure based on thickness – 2 days per ½” thickness + 2 days
I write on when it should be ready. If you go a day or so over its ok, but don’t shorten the time.

When the time is up, I soak the bacon (for that is what it is) for a couple of hours, then pat dry and leave in the fridge for three days to ‘equalise’. Its then sliced and eaten.

The ribs are cooked separately, and the skin turned into pork scratchings.

The above piece of pork yielded about 8lbs of dry cured bacon, at a cost of around £1.60/lb...Plus a large sheet of ribs and a bowl of scratchings! 🤑

Chapter 5 Dairy

Butter Making by Effigy

The basic ingredients – 3 cartons and a mixer!

I called in to Asda on my way home and they have their cream at a reduced price: £1 for 600ml (instead of £1.50), so I bought 3 cartons – 1.8l

While I was there I checked the price of their butter, which was £6/kg, and their buttermilk was £1.38 for 454ml.

Ok, so I poured the cream into a clean mixing bowl, and set the mixer running.

The cream whips as normal, firming up then going into stiff peaks.

Leave the mixer running, and the cream will take on the appearance of scrambled eggs.
Suddenly you will notice a lot of liquid being flung about; I was prepared this time and draped a tea towel around the bowl!

Stop the mixer – you have churned butter!

Strain the liquid off – this is buttermilk.

Now you have to thoroughly wash the butter to expel any residual buttermilk, as this will make the butter go rancid more quickly. Squish the

butter in cold water until the water runs clearer.

Butter and buttermilk.

Yield: 900g of best butter.

I roll the butter using cling film, and put it in the freezer to firm up. It took me just half an hour, including stopping to take photos.

When it is firm, I cut it into usable sizes. The butter will freeze well, but as it contains no preservatives, it won’t keep as long as shop bought butter, so I portion it out to last about 3 – 4 days.

The buttermilk will be used in soda bread (or corn bread), but this freezes as well if you are not going to use it immediately.

The economics of it surprised me; I spent £3 on the cream, and out of that I churned 900g of butter and 500ml of buttermilk; using the prices from the supermarket, the butter would cost £5.40 and the buttermilk £1.38 – total £6.78!

So apart from the pleasure of making your own butter, knowing exactly what goes into it, you save money as well!

Cheese Making by snoozer

after approximately 90 minutes the rennet has acted and I got a clean break

Draining the excess whey

And then hanging it for 30 minutes

2hrs under the bricks to squash the whey out leaving a pancake

Pancake (after 2 hrs squashing)

Now add 1oz of salt

And put the salted curds into a mold

The cheese will stay in the mold for about 3 days and will be turn every 12hrs to balance the cheese and remove the whey evenly

Well 3 1/2 days on and I have struck the cheese from its mould.

Here it is ready to be covered by a plastic jug. It will be turned daily for the next 4 weeks as it slowly changes colour as it forms a crust. At 4 weeks I have to pierce it with a sterilised knitting needle to get the blue veining.

Well, 4 weeks have passed and today is the day to pierce it with a sterilised needle (or in my case bamboo skewer). These piercings will create the blue veining.

Up until this point the cheese has been turned daily and is in a container with the lid just cracked a little.

I have had a good smell of the cheese and it smells just like stilton.

You may notice some cracking in the outer rind, this is because I let it get too dry, so I drop a couple of drops of cooled boiled water in the container

and sealed it up for a day and the cracking stopped.

Soft Cheese by Medicine Man

Adapted from Original Receipe by Sue Pointer in 'Beginners guide to Country Kitchen Cheese and Dairy'

2.5 Ltrs Milk
Freeze Dried Cheese Starter
2 Drops Vegatarian Rennet
Salt

Rennet, Starter and Dairy Thermometer

Gently heat milk to 32 degrees (This took longer than expected to gradually reach required temperature), then remove from heat

Add Freeze Dried Cheese Starter the small pack is designed for 50 Litres of milk so guesstimate 1/20th of powder, then mix well. In a separate container add Rennet to two tablespoons of boiled water then add to mix. Stir until its starts to coagulate (I stirred for ages and it didn`t set so left it to stand)

Leave for 1-1.5 hrs (Mine took 2-2.5 hrs)

Test for set by putting finger int0 curd, if it comes out clean its set. Ladle of the whey (watery yellowish liquid and keep aside for Whey cakes) without disturbing curd.

using a slotted spoon slice thin layers of curd and add them to the scalded moulds which need to sit on scalded cheese matting in a container to catch draining whey. The level of curd will decrease in the mould as the whey escapes allowing you to add more in.

Cheese in moulds
Add any flavouring and salt in between layers when placing in mould.

Leave in a warm room for 12-24 hrs for whey to drain, during period carefully tip cheese out of mould 2 or 3 times, turn and replace.

When cheese is solid enough to stand on its own decorate with nuts, herbs or cracked Pepper.

Yoghurt Making the Lazy Way

by Bushbaby

I'm a yoghurt addict. I'm not ashamed to admit it. I have it with my cereal in the morning, I have it with fruit in the evenings and I snack on it with maple syrup at lunch.

Red has been asking me for a while to post how I make the huge amount of yoghurt I eat, but the truth is I cheat so I've been a bit reluctant!

When I first looked at making yoghurt, I looked it up on the internet and thought Good grief all that phaff with measuring temperatures constantly and people recommended special thermometers am just too lazy. I looked at yoghurt makers and again thought am not paying good money for anything electrical. Then I saw the Easi-yo yoghurt maker not electric no temperature checks and thought Good idea but I'm not paying £9.99 for powder sachets making 10 litres I can still buy 500ml of basic yoghurt at the supermarket for 59p then I saw a customer review on the Lakeland web-site from a lady who said she used the Easi-yo maker to make yoghurt in the traditional way with a tablespoon of yoghurt and some milk.

Now I'm the proud owner of an Easi-yo yoghurt maker and this is how I cheat

Measure 1 litre of milk and bring it to the boil. You need to do this to kill any existing bacteria in the milk that might compete or kill the yoghurt bacteria. I use semi-skimmed milk or if I want very, very creamy yoghurt I use whole milk. I don't see the point in skimmed milk its only coloured water so I've never used it.

Allow the milk to cool and pop it in the fridge overnight.

Add 1 heaped tablespoon of yoghurt to the Easi-yo pot and add the cold milk and secure the top.
Fill the Easi-yo flask to the top of the red marker with boiling water.

Put in the yoghurt holder inside before securing the flask lid.

This is where the timings get interesting and are completely different to anything that I can find in normal yoghurt maker books (most say 6 to 8 hours!). If you are using yoghurt as your starter that you have made yourself leave the flask for 3 hours and 40 minutes, if you are using shop bought yoghurt as a starter leave it for 2 hours and 50 minutes. Trust me

- I've tried lots of different timing and these work.

When you get the yoghurt out, it will be a little bit runnier than shop bought, but never fear, pop it into the fridge for storage and by the time it has cooled down, the culture growth has continued plus the lowering of the temperature has a thickening effect.

If anyone has any ideas on how to improve this process because I feel like I’m cheating I’d love to hear.

Chapter 6 Preserves

Homemade tomato ketchup

by British Red

I have a habit of publishing a few preserving / homemade recipes at this time of year.

This is my adaption of an internet recipe for tomato ketchup. I like this one because you don't need to peel and de-seed the tomatoes – which is time consuming. The addition of vinegar and sugar improves the keeping qualities of the finished ketchup. The spices are heavy and fragrant and can / should be adapted. Fennel can certainly be omitted, chilli increased or celery added.

There is my "how to" on vinegar preparation on here somewhere and tomatoes and onions are very easy to grow. I need to sort out home sugar production to make this a truly long term recipe though

Ingredients
First Step Ingredients
3 lbs. Ripe Tomatoes, chopped
1 med Onion, diced
2 Garlic Cloves,
2 tsp Black Peppercorns
2 tsp Black Mustard Seeds
4 Allspice Berries
4 whole Cloves
2 tsp Fennel Seeds
13 Cinnamon stick
1 tsp Paprika
½ tsp Cayenne Pepper
1 fresh Bay Leaf

Second Step Ingredients
80ml Raw Cane Sugar
80ml Red Wine Vinegar
Juice 1/2 of a Lemon
1 tsp Sea Salt

1. Chop all the tomatoes (skins and seeds included) and place in a large stock pan

2. Finely chop the onion and garlic and add to the pan

3. Nip out to the herb store and measure out all the step 1 spices

4. Add the spices to you pan

5. Heat the pan and bring to a simmer

6. Cook for half an hour or so until the mixture becomes thick and reduced by a third to a half

7. Put the mixture into a food processor and blitz until smooth

8. Push the mixture through a fine nylon sieve into the rinsed stock pot with the back of a spoon to get the “bits” out

9. Add the sugar, vinegar, lemon and salt and simmer until the sugar had dissolved stirring constantly – takes about 5 minutes

10. Put into jars heated to 120C and seal

Hope that's fun for someone

Red

Damson & Apple Chutney

by Womble Lancs

We wombled some damsons and apples during the Autumn and decided to put them to good use

Ingredients

3 lb damsons, with the stones removed (nice messy job!)
1 lb cooking apples, with the peel left on, cored and chopped finely (I use the food processor, cos I'm lazy)
3 big onions, chopped finely
1 lb seedless raisins, washed in boiling water to remove any cack they put on in the shops
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 lb dark soft brown sugar
1 lb demerara sugar
2 heaped teaspoons ground ginger
2 small cinnamon sticks
1 oz allspice berries
1 dessertspoon cloves
2 tablespoons sea salt
2 pints malt vinegar

Utensils

Big pan, not copper
Wooden spoon
muslin bag, or large square of muslin
piece of string about 10" long

Method

Chuck the damsons, apples, onions, raisins, garlic, salt and sugars in the pan and mix well.

Wrap all the spices in the muslin and, using the string, tie it to the pan handle so that the muslin parcel is dangling in the mixture.

Bring it to the boil and then reduce the temperature so that it simmers very gently.

Stir every 10 mins or so for 2 hours, making sure that it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan.

After 2 hours, you'll need to stir it more often as it thickens.

The chutney is ready when you make a channel in it with the spoon and it doesn't fill up with vinegar.

When the chutney is ready, get the jars out of the oven and put them on your draining board. You must use hot jars; cold ones will break if you put hot chutney into them.

If you have a wide-mouthed funnel, use it to fill the jars. If not, carefully spoon the chutney into the hot jars, pop in a waxed paper circle on top and get the lid on PDQ. Leave to cool gradually. Do NOT put them in the fridge, it'll warm up the fridge and it might crack the jars.

Storage
Store the jars in a cool dark place. Although you can eat the chutney pretty much straight away, it is much better to allow it to mature for at least three months. If stored correctly, an unopened jar will be OK for years (I've got some over 5 years old and still fine). However, once opened, they'll only keep for about 9-12 months in the fridge. Use your judgement - if it has fur on it, don't eat it!

Rhubarb Chutney

by Womble_Lancs

Spike told me he didn't particularly like rhubarb, but when he tried my home-made chutney, he said "mmm, that's nice, what is it?". So he does like it, really.

So, here's the recipe:

Ingredients
5 lbs rhubarb, washed and cut into 1" lengths
1 lb onion, chopped into small chunks
2 lbs sugar
½ oz ground ginger (or 1 oz, if you like ginger 😃)
1 oz mixed spice
½ oz curry powder
½ oz salt
1½ pints vinegar (I use malt, but you can use white too)

Utensils
Large pan - not copper because the vinegar will eat it
Wooden spoon
glass jars with lids, sterilised

Method
Put the glass jars (but not the lids) in the oven and heat them up to 100°c / 212°f

Put ½ pint of vinegar in the pan and add all the other ingredients

Cook gently with a lid on until the fruit goes soft

Remove the lid and add the remaining vinegar, then bring up to simmering point and keep it simmering until the chutney thickens. You'll need to stir it more frequently as it gets thicker, to stop it sticking to the bottom of the pan.

The chutney is ready when you make a channel in it with the spoon and it doesn't fill up with vinegar.

When the chutney is ready, get the jars out of the oven and put them on your draining board. You must use hot jars; cold ones will break if you put hot chutney into them.

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Rose Petal Jam by blodders

When I was back on R&R there were loads of Dog Roses blooming all over the place so, having perused Richard mabey's food for Free, I decided to have a go at rose petal jam.

I collected what seemed like loads of petals (you pick the ones that are just about to drop, dog roses don’t really shrivel the petals just drop off) whilst out walking the dog. I knew I needed 2 cups for the recipe so I filled the pocket of my fleece.

When I got home they had miraculously shrunk to 1 cupful when pressed down 😟

Half a pound of jam it is then! 🤩
Bring a cup of sugar, a tablespoonful of lemon juice and half a cup of water to the boil

Add the petals and boil, stirring continuously for 30 mins or untill the petals sort of dissolve (you could make this with "garden" roses but they have much thicker petals that don't really dissolve like dog arses do)

At the end of the 30 mins mine hadnt completely dissolved but they had gone transparent and jelly like and the kitchen smelled fantastic! Anyway in it went to a sterilised jar, doesnt look much but tastes like, well, roses really. Absolutely gorgeous, though the texture is not really jammy, somewhere between really cold golden syrup and evostick!

Anyway, I can heartily recommend this stuff, tastes really good, goes well on crackers or in plain yogurt.

Rhubarb and Ginger Jam by Chris Breen

This is a slight adaption on another recipe but didn`t turn out too bad at all:

1kg Rhubarb, chopped
1kg Jam Sugar
1 pint Water
100g Ginger in Syrup, chopped

Makes Approx 3.5 lbs Jam

Trim and chop the rhubarb. Place the rhubarb, Jam sugar into a Large saucepan and cover with water.

Bring to the boil, stirring occasionally for 15 minutes or until the fruit is tender.

Add the chopped ginger. Return to the boil and simmer until the rhubarb is clear, stirring frequently until reaches set temperature of 105 degrees

Scaled Jars and Lids with Boiling water then put Jars in preheated oven for 4 minutes. Pour the jam into sterilised jars

Caramelised Onion Relish

by British Red

Well, there was some demand for this - so here it is. This is a rough and ready "too many onions" recipe. It also is set up for large quantities and need a very large pan. Feel free to halve the quantities involved.

First you need 12 large or 18 medium red onions. You can use white onions but I have found red give the better flavour.

Before you start, sharpen your largest chef's knife. Everything in this needs to be cut fine. Really if you haven't got a 10" or more razor sharps chef's knife anyway...go buy a Big Mac

Slice each onion as finely as you can. No, finer than that!

Then cut into fine "strips", I cut into something where no length is longer than an inch and the other two sides are as fine as I can get them

Put all these into a pan that has a small amount of veg oil in it. Smalll means small - a couple of tablespoons is plenty. The pan should hold at least 7 litres (quarts) as more is to come and you need room to stir.

You will also need, two pints of "dark" vinegar. This means red wine, malt, or balsamic. I use half balsamic (for sweetness) and half red wine or

malt. "Sweat" the onions stirring regularly until they have softened.

You also need two pints of unrefined sugar, thirty peppercorns (crushed in your pestle and mortar) and half a dozen bay leaves.

Add the vinegar, sugar and spices to the softened onions

Stir the whole shebang together

Bring to the boil

Lower the heat to a simmer. Now here you need patience. For this amount it will take about three hours to reduce. You need to drive off all the free liquid. If you do a half amount - halve the simmer time.

This recipe started with about 5 litres (quarts) of liquid and onion

After an hour we had 80% (four quarts)

After two hours we are down to 60% (3 quarts)

After two and a half hours we only have 40% (two quarts) and its getting gloopy. At this point hold your nerve and watch closely. As it reduces in volume, it begins to caramelise and take on that lovely "slightly

burned onion on a burger" flavour. It needs to do this. Stick your jars on to warm now.

When you have a thick jammy relish, take your jars out (about 15mins of warming is fine). Stick a jam funnel in one and begin ladling in your warm relish

I had an "event" here. An unevenly warmed jar shattered as the hot relish hit it! A good reminder that hot sugar and glass are a dangerous mixture.

Red

Sweetcorn Relish Recipe

by British Red

Here’s "my" method of sweet corn relish. It makes a lot but its easy to do a third of the recipe

Put 750g or white sugar in a steel saucepan

Pour on 1.5 litres of white distilled vinegar

Gently warm the pan until the sugar has dissolved then take off the heat

Add 1.5kg of sweetcorn kernels. Frozen works but if you have access to fresh this time of year, that’s about 20 ears (loads in the fields round us)

Finely dice and add three green peppers

Then three red peppers

Then six sticks of celery

Finely chop six cloves of garlic and add it

Then finely dice three large white onions and add

Add 30ml of mustard seed and 10ml of turmeric stirring well

Bring the mixture to a rolling boil, reduce to a simmer and simmer for 20 minutes stirring regularly.

Take 45ml of salt and 10 ml of pepper and stir it into the pan.

Then take 45ml of cornflour and 45 ml of mustard powder.

Mix the powders and gradually mix in water to make a paste like thick batter

Carefully stir this mixture into the corn and simmer for 5 more minutes

Pour the mixture into warm sterilised jars, seal and leave to cool

Enjoy

Red

Thai Sweet Chilli Sauce Recipe by British Red

Well, it's become a bit of a tradition for me to do a few recipes at this time of year. A combination of longer evenings, excess produce, upcoming gift giving all spur me on to "preserve".

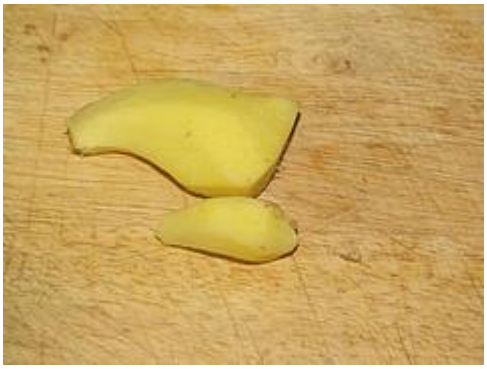
This is one of my favourites - Thai sweet chilli sauce - a great dipping sauce or use as a condiment on meat or with cheese.

The Ingredients

1 Kg of peeled chopped de-seede tomatoes (you can used tinned but most of us end up with loads this time of year)
A head of garlic
8 large red chillies (avoid scotch bonnets or nagas - medium hot like tabasco is my favourite but milder is great)
About two table spoons of grated fresh ginger (a piece the size of three fingers)
4 Tbs of Nam Pla (Thai fish sauce - available in all supermarkets)
600g of unrefined sugar
200ml or vinegar (I like red wine vinegar for this)

Preparing a puree

First put your tomatoes in a blender
Then take a sharp knife and peel your ginger. It should be juicy and moist not hard and woody.



Grate or finely chop the ginger

Take the garlic and peel all the cloves. Put the garlic and ginger in the blender

Take the tops and tails off your chillies

Roughly chop the chillies - seeds and all!

Add the chilli to the blender

Pour four tablespoons of fish sauce into the blender

Blitz the contents of the blender to a puree

Put the puree in a large stainless pan and add 600g of raw sugar and 200ml of vinegar

Stir the ingredeints well. You'll notice the colour darken a bit

Cooking

Bring the contents of the pan to the boil stirring gently

Lower to a simmer. A small froth or scum will form - skim this off and discard

Maintain the simmer stirring occasionally for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes put 6 half pint jars in the oven to warm for another 15 minutes -

keep stirring and skimming the sauce

When the jars are hot, fill them with the hot sauce (a jam funnel is a great help).

Take care - hot jar...hot sauce..burnt fingers!
Seal the jars firmly and wait for the lids to "ping"

This sauce is hotter than the commercial stuff so adjust to your taste.
Enjoy!

Red

A Jar of Mustard - The Hard Way by British Red

This is a bit of a "quest" for me. It's a longish post because it was a longish process. I hope it's interesting enough to someone to justify reading it.

This year I set out to make my own mustard. Entirely mine – from scratch. Before I did that I had to be able to produce a vinegar or cider base to make it "keep" well (although mustard can be made with water but it doesn't keep as well). Anyway – my forays into wine and vinegar making have been well covered in other pictorials so let's take it as read that I have plenty of entirely home produced wine and vinegar to hand.

To start off, lets wind back to early spring. I started off with a load of mustard seed. Basic yellow mustard seed is often sold in garden centres

for growing sprouted “mustard “ as in “mustard and cress”.

However a little reading on the subject indicated that the very best mustards are grown from brown and black seed

A few phone calls to catering suppliers supplied whole grain mustard in brown and black

Now given this stuff was intended to be cooked with, not grown, I had no idea if it would germinate. Only one way to find out though – get it planted!

I used a variety of planting techniques – plug trays – three inch pots etc. The technique was the same though. Plant up a well draining seed compost (a mix of sharp sand and garden compost that had been sieved), pop the mustard on top.

Then a light sprinkle of potting mix over the top and a label. I suspected that the devil would be in the detail – type and growing medium would come into play and I wanted to know which type of mustard was what!

The pots were placed into cold germinating frames to await developments

Keep an eye on the little sneakers now – two maybe three days will see them sprouting. Remember growing mustard on blotting paper? Shows how easy it is to germinate

Now when “singling out”, don’t pull out your spares, cut them off with scissors. This prevents root damage by disturbing the remaining plants – plus the “trimmings” are delicious!

Once the plants get four good leaves, pot on any “plugs” you have grown

Once you achieve a good 6” plant its ready for planting out

If you want to pot grow these plants get huge – even from the tiny seeds. Pots should be at least “bucket” sized. Even then they will need copious water. Planting in 18” rows in the garden and thinning out will be far better.

I pot grew many experimental varieties this year. Never again.

Once thinned out or potted on, let your mustard grow…and grow….and grow. It may be a baby seed but it grows BIG. 3’ tall by 3’ across. Ever seen a field of oilseed rape? That big.

When its 2’ tall it will start to flower. It looks like this

It will keep growing as it flowers though – each plant can produce more than a hundred flowers and many hundred seeds

Eventually (and it takes till August / September) the flowers will turn to seedpods and the plant dies and dries. Again, it takes far longer than you might expect

The Yellow mustard makes short stubby seedpods with three to five fat large seeds in each

Black and Brown mustard makes smaller longer pods but with many more seeds in each

testing readiness to harvest is tricky. My way was to take a seed pod and roll my hand around it. If it popped open offering clean dry seed – Its ready

Now basic cutting is going to depend on scale. For home use I decided on a fairly economical approach – cutting down with grass hook or even secateurs and then stripping into a bucket. Best achieved by gripping the stems and ripping the pods off against the lay. Use gloves as they are

sharp wee things.

Interestingly my black / brown mustard ripened three or four weeks before the fatter yellow pods. Only more experience will tell me if this is normal

Eventually a bucket of seedpods is achieved. On a larger scale whole plants could be threshed in the same manner as wheat or rice. I would advise doing so on a sheet or tarp to gather the gleanings.

Shaking the crushed pods lets the seeds fall to the bottom. The husks can easily be picked up in handfuls and added to the compost heap

Eventually all the larger husks can be separated from the seed just by shaking and picking. But some finer dust and “chaff” remains

I struggled a bit to remove this chaff. Then I thought of old fashioned “winnowing” on a windy day. Traditionally done in a dished wide basket. Of course I had nothing like that……or did I. In a moment of inspiration I grabbed the Wok

Tossing the seed on a windy day allowed the wind to take the lighter chaf away whilst the seed dropped back in the pan. In an ideal world I would use one of the older birch bark (wider and shallower) winnowing baskets – it would be more efficient. But the work surely proved the process

A few weeks later I separated the yellow mustard in the same way.

You can clearly see the difference in size of the black and yellow seeds (the brown are very similar to black in both plant structure and size)

Now that we have some seed its time to process it. The first step is to grind some seeds to a fine powder. This forms "mustard flour" (a good way of thinking how fine it should be). For a basic honey mustard, I start with some yellow mustard seeds

As you can see, I'm using a heavyweight pestle and mortar. If you want to use modern tools that's fine. Either a specialist spice grinder or cheap coffee grinder works. I would advise though that you clean the blades between coffee and spices – brush out all the powder you can see than then grind some dry breadcrumbs to absorb any lingering flavours. Oils cause the pungency in mustard so it will linger.

A good workout later and we have mustard flour

If you want to store this stuff, my advice is to store the un-ground seed. The flour will last longer than mixed mustard so there's no harm in keeping some mustard flour for a good few months and mixing it up as needed – keep it in an airtight jar though.

A jar of mustard is simply mustard flour mixed with a liquid – water is fine. I find better flavours can be achieved (and better "keeping" qualities) by using wine or vinegar. My advice is to make water based mustards in small quantities and use quickly or keep in the fridge.

Lets make some quick English honey mustard

You will need:

¼ cup yellow mustard flour
3 tbs COLD water (never hot in mustard making)
1 tbs olive oil
¼ tsp honey

Put all the ingredients into a bowl. I find putting the water in first easiest as the dry ingredients float and soak up water – you don't get dry clumps at the bottom.

Blend well with a fork

Pack into a jar and keep in the fridge

That's it – a jar of slightly honey flavoured "English" mustard. Easy huh? The flavours will actually improve if you leave it a couple of weeks before sampling – bet you don't though!

Okay the next one is more of an illustration of what can be achieved with relative ease. Sadly I cannot become self sufficient in some of the spices… yet although substitutes are easily possible. However it's worth considering that really fine whole grain mustard is easily within the reach of the home grower

Whole Grain Mustard

1 cup water
1 cup brown mustard flour
¾ cup black mustard seed
1 ¼ cup white wine (see wine making threads)
1 cup vinegar (see vinegar making threads. You see how all this stuff snowballs)
½ cup brown sugar (honey makes a good substitute)
¼ cup finely chopped onion (from the garden naturally)
1 ½ tsp cinnamon (struggling to find a good substitute but many herbs are available.)
½ tsp salt
½ tsp turmeric
2 egg yolks (as emulsifiers)

I tend to pre measure the ingredients – it saves flapping later

Dry ingredients

Wet Ingredients

Mix the water, mustard flour and mustard seed in a bowl

Put the wine, vinegar, sugar, onion, cinnamon, turmeric and salt into a saucepan. Bring to the boil and reduce to a gentle simmer. Simmer for 20minutes then turn off the heat and leave to infuse for another 10 minutes

Strain the contents of the pan into a jug

Stir the egg yolks into the mustard mix

Add a cup of the strained “liquor”

Put the completed mixture back in your saucepan and return to the heat. Stir over a medium heat until the mixture thickens

When thick and bubbly, quickly chill the mixture by plunging the pan into ice water and stirring for a couple of minutes

Transfer your cooled mustard to suitable sized jars – a jam funnel is really going to help here

Seal well and there we have it – high grade, handmade, whole grain mustard

The last thing to do is save some of your mustard seed for next years planting – so you cans start again

Red

Christmassy Cranberry Sauce

By British Red

I've been making my own cranberry sauce for years, but like trying other peoples recipes. This year I combined some of my favorites and am very pleased with the results.

You will need:

1kg of fresh cranberries (2lb 3oz)
A dozen Satsuma's (juice and zest).
400g (14oz) raw cane sugar
1 heaped teaspoonful of allspice
100ml of bullace vodka (to taste). You could use sloe vodka or brandy or even port. Avoid gin though

Recipe

Wash the cranberries and sling any spoiled or unripe ones.

Put the cranberries in a saucepan.

Wash the satsumas and grate half the zest

Squeeze the juice and add to the pan.

Press the flesh through a metal sieve to catch any pith or pips.

Add the sugar and allspice and stir.

Bring to a gentle simmer, stirring constantly to dissolve the sugar and make sure it doesn’t stick or burn.

Simmer for 15 minutes until all the cranberries are popped.
Warm some jars in the oven for the last ten minutes at 120C.

Test to see if the sauce sets on a cold plate, if not, return to the heat and simmer some more.

Remove from the heat, leave for a couple of minutes and stir in the bullace vodka.

Pot in warm sterilised jars using a jam funnel

You should get about six half pound jars and a little over

This makes a very nice source - the sweetness of the Satsuma's sets off the tartness of the cranberries. The allspice and fruity vodka add a little hint of holiday cheer.

Enjoy

Red

Sweet Pickled Shallots by British Red

You might like these by way of variety from the normal "cruchy and sharp" pickled onion

You will need 2 1/2lbs of shallots
4tbs of muscavado (raw cane) sugar
A few bay leaves and sprigs of time
2 1/2 cups of balsamic vinegar

Firstly boil a kettle and cover the shallots in boiling water for a couple of minutes

Cut the "tops and tails" off the shallots. Having been in the hot water, the skins should come off easily

Put the vinegar, muscovado sugar and herbs in a pan and bring to the boil. Add the peeled shallots and simmer gently for 45 minutes

Warm some jars in the oven towards the end of the gentle simmer. You will need 3 1/2 pint jars or equivalent.

Using a slotted spoon put the softened shallots into the jars gently pushing them in. Cover with the vinegar but remove the herbs. Seal firmly while warm and leave for a month before eating.

These onions are soft, sweet and slightly tangy. They go well with the meats and soft cheeses of Italy and France - my normal "pickled onions" are happier with doorsteps and mature cheddar!

Chapter 7 Cookery

This section is designed to show that cookery around a fireplace, either indoors or outdoors, need not be boring. An open flame doesn't restrict you to ration packs and boil in the bag food. You can still be inventive with what you cook and want to eat, taking advantage of a variety of full flavours.

In some cases the recipes are suitable only for camp meets or cooking on your home fireplace due to the need to use more than one pot. However there are some dishes which require only one pot or even a Billy-can so you can cook from fresh on the go without weighing yourself down with more equipment than you would have taken otherwise.

Why compromise just because your heat source for cooking is an open flame?

Bushbaby

Fireplace Cookery by Bushbaby

OK, so I've been a wee bit bored stuck at home, so with February in mind, I thought I'd experiment with the open fireplace.

Now, we successfully managed to cook roast chicken pieces at the last meet, but it was a bit insipid so I wanted to find a way of getting a more traditional roast chicken. So here is attempt one...

This is the fireplace heating up and the cast iron airtight pot I was originally going to use. Unfortunately it’s too big for the fireplace!!! I had to improve instead. So I have an old steamer pot. This means the chicken is raised away from the external ironmongery so is less likely to burn, but unfortunately it’s not as airtight as the original dutch oven.

So, the chicken goes in the pot and into the fire:

Unfortunately this position was too hot and I also realised that the oil used to baste the chicken was alight. Whoops. Pot came off the fire and I added water into the main vessel under the steamer tray containing the chicken. This worked well and helped to add additional moisture to the meat.

I then placed the pot in a slightly cooler spot….

After about two hours (I wanted to cook it for a long time to be sure it was OK) the chicken looked nicely cooked: All that was left was to get it on the plate:

Camerons Gourmet Mini Smoker

by Chris Breen

Quite expensive for what it is but well made. I got mine in a sale for £25 but they seem to be about £39 RRP.

Consists of a stainless steel box much like a large mess tin with a sliding lid. Inside is a tray with a detachable cooking grid.

The set comes with two sample pots of wood chips. I got Alder and Hickory chips you can buy others such as Apple, Bourbon Oak, Cherry, Maple, Mesquite, oak or pecan. Or make you own.

One and a half tablespoons of chips are placed in tray the grid placed on top and the tray placed in the box. Your food is placed on top and the box almost closed.

Once smoked starts to appear close the box and start cooking time from then.

The box will hold about two pounds of fish, meat or vegetables, larger items can be cooked using a foil tent in place of the lid.

Fish and chicken breast (2lb) takes 25 minutes
a Whole chicken or leg of lamb (4lbs) takes 45 minutes, Additional (1lb) takes an extra 5-10 minutes

The heat source can be a stove top, BBQ or open fire

Its recommended to use fragrant salt to flavour the food, again you can buy preparation or make you own I got mine with the steamer they are made by Steenberg Organic

http://www.steenbergs.co.uk/

Below are pictures of some delicious smoked mackerel i bartered for some eggs

Pumpkin soup by British Red

I wrote this a couple of years back - thought it might interest you

The Triffids are coming. Fortunately I must have been so drunk last night that I missed the green meteorites that blinded everyone else, but, when I looked behind the old barn where I threw some pumpkin seeds earlier in the year, there they were

Sinister things - not only have they swarmed up the side of the barn but climbed a 9' hedge and are climbing down the other side...they sit there gradually taking over the world, rattling their stems. People tell me they are pumpkins - we know better - we had to fight back.....

We grabbed one of their "pumpkins"

BB sliced off the outer rind

Then cut it in half and scooped out the soft pulp and seeds

The flesh was chopped into 1" cubes

Mean time I had a wander round the garden for a few more ingredients

Onions (1 per lb of chopped pumpkin)

Thyme (1 1/2 tbs of chopped leaves per lb of pumpkin)

I grabbed some garlic thats been drying in the shed (1 clove per lb of pumpkin)

BB sorted out a load of chicken stock (1 1/4 pints per lb of pumpkin)

The onions were roughly chopped and sweated off in a couple of tablespoons of olive oil

Then the pumpkin was added with the garlic (crushed) and the lot was softened for a couple of minutes

I grated a couple of orange and juiced them (half an orange per lb of pumpkin)

Then I chopped the thyme having stripped out the stalks

The orange juice and rind, stock, and thyme was put in the big stock pan and the lot simmered for 20 minutes

After that we used a potato crusher to reduce it all to pulp and then gave it a quick whiz with a stick blender
And we had it for tea!

For all of that - I've been back out to the barn and they don't seem afraid...I think they are talking to each other

Self Sufficient - sadly not yet - our oranges aren't big enough this year (although they have fruited) so the Oranges were bought in - as was the olive oil although I plan to make our own next year. Still - we're getting there

Red

Curried Pumpkin soup

by WitchMisspelled

I don't recognize that variety of pumpkin. If you can get hold of the variety called Cheese Pumpkin or Long Island Cheese Pumpkin, I can tell you its taste is far superior to any pumpkins I've cooked and baked with. It's an heirloom variety which has more flesh.

The soup recipe sounds good.. similar to a curried pumpkin soup I make. For curried pumpkin soup, add in:

1 clove garlic, minced
2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger root
2 teaspoons curry powder
1/4 teaspoon crushed red peppers
1/2 teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon coriander
2 teaspoons brown sugar

Right before serving add in 1/2 cup heavy cream. Heat leftovers to simmer or the cream will curdle.

I'm sure you already know this, but don't put harvested pumpkins on the hard ground or table. Put a layer of straw under them and store them in one layer with breathing space in between. Don't bring them indoors and don't let them freeze and you should have them through at least February.

Chicken & Sweet corn Soup by Bushbaby

Another one-pot recipe for you. If you like the chicken & sweet corn soup you get at your local Chinese take-away – this is the recipe (without the dreaded MSG), plus it’s easy to make in a power cut or on the campfire.

The ingredients:

2 pints of chicken stock
300g of sweetcorn creamed – you can buy it in a can ready creamed if you are away from home on a campfire or you can "process" the sweetcorn by sticking it in hand or electric blender
1 chicken breast diced finely
3 spring onions chopped finely
2 egg whites mixed with a little milk
5 heaped teaspoons of cornflour mixed with cold water

First heat the chicken stock on the fire until it boils:

Then add the sweet corn:

The chicken (make sure you stir when you add the chicken so it doesn't stick to the pot) and the spring onions:

Bring the pot back to the boil

Once boiling, slowly pour in the cornflour mixed with water whilst stirring. This will thicken the soup. Keep adding until you are happy with the

consistency.

The final ingredients are the eggs whites mixed with the milk. This forms the strange milky "streaks" you see in the takeaway soup. To get this effect again you need to pour the mixture slowly into the soup whilst stirring. This will give you the finished article to eat and enjoy!

Coconut Chilli Prawns by BushBaby

Ingredients:
2 teaspoons of powdered cumin
1 cubic inch of ginger
2 shallots
1 green chilli (spicy), 3 green chilli's (my favourite – hot!)
3 cloves of garlic (peeled)
A small amount of olive oil to lubricate the wok when cooking
1 can of reduced/low fat coconut milk
3 large standard (not beef) tomatoes
Fresh coriander chopped roughly
10 raw king prawns…but actually you can add as many prawns as you like whether king-sized or standard but all are best raw and shelled.

1. Prepare the tomatoes by de-skinning. Score the flesh in one or two times on the tomato and plunge into boiling water for a few seconds. Once removed from the water the skin should peel off easily. Once de-skinned, roughly chop the tomatoes.
2. Finely chop the shallots (optional)
3. Finely chop the chilli, ginger and garlic or cheat and put them in a blender for a short period of time.
4. Add a small amount of extra virgin olive oil to a wok and lightly fry the shallot until they are translucent.
5. Add the ginger, chilli, garlic and powdered cumin to the wok and continue stirring until you can smell the flavours coming through.
6. Add the coconut milk and bring to the boil.
7. Add the tomatoes and prawns.
8. At this stage you should keep the heat on and reduce the liquid until it is the consistency you want – recommended fairly runny if you are having it

with rice or really thick if you are going to eat it on it own as a “soup”.
9. Just before serving add the coriander for added flavour

Something Sweet by Bushbaby

In response to requests for something sweet on the fireplace I've made cherry flapjacks:

The ingredients:

75g low fat spread or full fat butter if calories aren't a problem
3 tablespoons of golden syrup (honey works, but not quite as well)
75g of soft sugar either dark or light brown
150g of muesli
50g of rolled oats
5ml (1 teaspoon) mixed spice (but you can miss this out if necessary)
100g of fruit in this case I've used chopped glace cherries, but it could be dried mixed fruit or sultanas or raisins

Add the spread, golden syrup and sugar to a pan and heat slowly to mix the ingredients until they are an opaque caramel. Be careful on the fire not to burn the sugar.

Add the muesli, oats, mixed spice and fruit to the caramel.

Spoon the mixture to an oven tray

In this case I'm using a slightly different crock for the fire with a wire tray to keep the oven tray away from the direct heat.

Cook until golden brown, Cut into slices whilst still hot otherwise the whole thing will be impossible to cut, then eat and enjoy.

Lady Cliffords Sweet by Phil

Lady Cliffords Sweet--serves 4
5 fl.oz. Plain yogurt, 5 fl.oz Whipping cream,
5 fl.oz. Plain soft cheese(Philly). 175gm Muscado sugar.

A. mix items 1+2+3 with mixer.
B. line bottom of bowl with 1/2 the sugar.
C. add mix.
D. cover with the rest of sugar.
Refrigerate overnight.

ED: To make 'in the field', could you use a hand mixer and stick it outside in an animal proof container overnight. I expect that would be as least as cold as my fridge as the mo.

Game Cooking (not for the squeamish)

by British Red

First take one Jason (good shot that he is) and a couple of woodies!

On a wood pigeon, most of the edible meat is on the breast, so you can just skin and breast the bird, make 2 slits above the groin, push your thumbs in and split the skin up and away from the breast till it looks like this....

The dark bruise like areas are where the shot went in... make sure it comes out later (a good way to break a tooth if it doesn't)! Push the skin well back from the entire rib cage using your thumb.. it'll end up looking like this...

Slice the dark breast meat away from the rib cage - this actually needs two cuts to get all the good meat... something like this.....

Next take a decent sized rabbit.....shot or...whatever else comes to hand.....joint up and add to the stew.....

Add spuds, onions, and a few carefully jointed bits of duck (thanks Jason) to the pot.

Now that’s okay for runny food. Me, I prefer my meat with the fat out and well grilled. Hmmm how do we achieve that without a grill? Well, first we pluck, clean and "spatchcock" the second pigeon (split up the breastbone).

Take a "Y shaped piece of green willow. Spiral the two long arms around each other to form the "frame" of a tennis racket. Weave more green willow and weave a "tennis racket". Place the pigeon on top and weave more willow over the top to keep in place.

Stake the "handle" of your "tennis racket" beside the fire do that the "head" of the "racket" hangs over the fire. turn every ten minutes. You can rub butter and herbs into the flesh and skin if you like. You should end up with something like this

Simple Snails by Rhomboid

Sorry about the delay in posting this. Various factors beyond my control interrupted the snail trail.

anyway:

In winter snails are hibernating, and consequently do not have any potential unpleasantness in their guts. This means they can be cooked and eaten immediately. In other seasons, when they are active, it is necessary to keep them in quarantine for a few days on a controlled diet in order to purge their guts of any plant matter they may have eaten which could be toxic to humans. (In Elizabeth david's 'French Provincial Cooking' - one of the best books about food ever written, she quotes an old French method which involves keeping the snails on a starvation diet for one month - this is way over the top)

I will do another post later in the year showing the 'Snail Sangatte' method, but for now we are doing the easy route.

First locate your snails. The other advantage of winter hibernation is that they often cluster together.

If you can find one, you may well have found a dozen. Warm, dry, sheltered spots are favoured (understandably).around the base of drain gulley's is often a good bet, or if you have anything leaning against a sheltered wall, you may be in luck. As seen here - the second place I looked and Bingo! A dozen sails in one go! Sorry chaps, safety in numbers does not apply here.

Other good places to look are under rocks in rockeries, behind woodpiles etc. My front path is bordered with large chunks of flint, which are usually a good bet for finding wee sleekit beasties beneath. just pick up a rock and... lo and behold...

After less than five minutes I had found about 30 or so snails of various sizes. Once you get a feel for the kinds of places they lurk, it is quite easy. If you have children, snail-hunting' is a very exciting activity, and i would imagine in a post TSHTF scenario might provide a welcome diversion as well as performing a useful function.

Okay. Big tip here, and going back to my opening apology for the delay in posting this: once you have captured your snails, proceed with reasonable speed to the next step, be that quarantine and purging or direct to cooking pot.

Do not, as i did on this occasion, leave them in a plant pot outside for a

few days (actually they were in a plant pot in the kitchen at first but wisely moved outside when TSHTF and we decamped to the hospital again).

In this instance the delay was unavoidable, but the net result was that when I returned to the project this evening, only 7 of the original 30 remained, the others having either absconded or provided a cheap takeaway for the robin that visits our garden every day. Reports of one snail jumping the border to Switzerland on a motorcycle are unconfirmed.

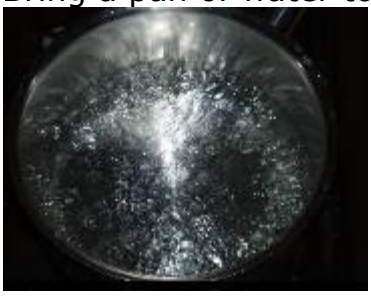
However, for the purposes of demonstration, 7 snails are quite sufficient. I resisted naming them after the 7 dwarves for fear of becoming too emotionally attached.

On to preparation:
some people are distressed by the fact that snails have an inherent sliminess and choose to coat their snails in salt before cooking them. I find this incomprehensible and utterly wrong. If you have an issue with sliminess, go and eat packet of tortilla chips. if you find it acceptable to coat a gastropod in salt than karmically perhaps one day you will be peeled alive and wrapped in salt and see how you like it...

Sorry, rant over. Used to have big problems with this issue when I lived in Catalunya. To my mind eating animals is quite morally acceptable, causing undue suffering in the process is not, and if anything is likely to cause undue suffering, coating live snails in salt is pretty high on the list.

Anyway onto humane dispatch:

Bring a pan of water to a rolling boil



Then simply tip in Brian and his chums. The shock of the boiling water kills them instantly.

You can add a splash of vinegar to the water here or some herbs to make a court-bouillon but I am going for simple and basic, which is equally good and probably more pertinent to a Trangia/survival scenario.

Bring the water back to the boil then simmer for 10 minutes or so. Drain the water off. Then extract the snails from their shells you will need a sharp pointy thing (une chose pointue as Escoffier might have said). I should have demonstrated with the toothpick from my Swiss Army knife but didn't think of it...

There is a slight knack to doing this and getting them out in one piece which is difficult to describe - a sort of wrist-flicking motion - however it is not at all hard to master and with a modicum of practice you will be ablt to do it with one hand (while taking photographs with the other)

Major caveat:
DO NOT EVER EAT SNAILS OR SLUGS RAW OR PARTIALLY COOKED they are major infection vectors and people have died horribly having done so.

Camp Coffee by British Red

Well, with thanks to the discovery of green coffee beans - heres the new "perfect coffee for camp"

Now I haven't compromised making this – I'm after the PERFECT brew here. So we will start with roasting our own beans. This needs a lot of heat and movement. It takes about 10 minutes and needs 200 degrees plus C (500F). So, take your green beans of choice. Green beans keep much longer and fresher than roasted beans. You can buy online from a number of sources and then roast them as needed. They are much smaller than roasted beans as they "pop" like popcorn when roasted. Some people do this in a popcorn maker or specialist air roaster. But we are bushcrafters right? So we'll use a skillet. Put a good double handful (or more) of beans in your skillet. Here's what they look like in the pan

Now we need to get our pan hot. In camp, a good bed of coals is ideal, but I'm doing these photos at home as I just had a load of beans delivered. A good excuse to try out my new MSR Dragonfly. A lid is useful here to get the heat up

Keep the beans moving in the pan. You can leave the lid on at this stage – the idea is to stop them burning on one side (they will cook a little unevenly – just try to minimise it so it evens out over time. After a few minutes they start to change colour

Soon you will hear faint popping (like popcorn). This is where the right pan is handy. You can do this in a billycan, but in a skillet, you can move and "toss" the beans. This lets the skin catch the breeze and blow away (like the fine skin you get making popcorn). See the stuff stuck to the sides of the pan? That's the skin.

Now, you can roast darker or lighter at this stage. Not sure how dark? Well roast it a while, take some out, put in a bowl, roast some more to a darker roast. You'll soon find what's best for you. It varies with the type of bean too…

When you are happy with the roast, ideally let it rest for 3 or 4 hours. If impatient, just let it cool and transfer the cooled beans to your hand grinder. If you have loads of chaff, toss the beans in the air with a bit of a breeze – the chaff blows away (like winnowing wheat)

Crank your hand mill to grind the beans. You can adjust the coarse / fine nature of the grind. The one shown here was a little coarse so I tightened the mill and put it back through.

Grind enough coffee for the percolator basket. See below for the main parts of a percolator – a pot with a glass lid (important that bit – you'll see why later). Fill the pot with cold water so that the basket, when put in the pot, is just clear of the water. Put the lid on the basket, put in the pot and close the lid. Put the pot on the stove or fire and raise the temperature

Raise the temperature of the put till "blurbs" of water force themselves up the pipe in the middle of the basket and filter back through the coffee into the water. Now regulate the temperature until you get a "blurp" of water every couple of seconds. The best coffee is not boiled hard but kept at a lowish even temperature. You can monitor the colour of the coffee and the speed of "blurp" through the glass lid

After five minutes – or when the coffee looks right, remove from the heat and pour into favourite mug. I take mine with a dash of milk if available – otherwise black. Purists say always black but hey – this is MY perfect coffee 😀

Acorn Coffee by British Red

I shelled a good few by squeezing between thumb and forefinger. A few were stubborn so I applied my Leatherman squeezing top to bottom

Now these were big acorns, so I roughly chopped them down to a more manageable roasting size. Actually, after first roast, I needed to take them down to a slightly smaller size.. Small pea / coffee bean is ideal.

So I chucked the roughed chopped pieces into the heavy pan I roast my coffee in

I shoved the pan on my stove and roasted outdoors – loads of smoke and a lovely smell rather reminiscent of hazel nuts I thought

Always a bit tricky roasting anything new so I kept the pan moving and went for a darker brown colour. Its worth noting that the skin dries and flakes away as you roast. A good flick into the air on a breezy day and the skin just blows away

Finally got a nice dark colour going – checked occasionally on the softness of the larger piece. I was going for a good hard consistency. Let them cool and bunged the pieces into my coffee grinder and ended up with a nice coarse powder

Placed the powder into a cafeteria and added some boiling water and left it for about 5 minutes

Acorns really do make a very pleasant drink – nutty and smooth. Not coffee of course but neither is blackberry leaf of peppermint and I like them too!

Tastes really nice - found stack of beechmast too - ate that though

Super Yummy Flapjacks

by (MRS) English Hearts

Ingredients
225g (8oz) self raising flour
225g (8oz) oats
225g (8oz) butter
2 tbsp golden syrup
175g (6oz) soft brown sugar
small handful or dried fruit
e.g. blueberries, cranberries,
raisins, sultanas

Method
1. Melt the butter and syrup in a pan
2. Add the dry ingredients (inc the sugar)
3. Stir together in the pan
4. Press into greased tin
5. Cook in pre-heated oven at 350F/180C/Gas Mark 4 for approx 20-25 mins
6. When almost cold cut into squares, wait until completely cold to take out of tin.

These are the best flapjacks I have ever made (and I have tried lots of recipes) as they have self raising flour in they raise slightly like a cake and are much lighter.

Regards
FW

Pheasant Stir Fry **by Countryboy**

Ingredients:
2 pheasant breasts and 2 thighs
1 onion
half a red pepper, half a green pepper
some spinach, 3 big mushrooms
purple sprouting broccoli
mixed seeds, clove of garlic
chilli (optional)
soy sauce
water
2 slabs of egg noodles

Slice the pheasant breasts and remove the meat from the thighs. Chop all of the veg as fine as you like it. Fry the onion and garlic in a little olive oil then add the meat. Stir fry until lightly browned. Add all of the veg and carry on frying. Splash in some soy sauce and add the chillis. Once it cooks down a bit add a splash of water so that all the juices make a nice dark gravy.

Boil some water and bung in a couple of slabs of noodles. Cook noodles until done (3-4 mins). Drain noodles and throw into wok with the meat and veg. Toss it all over a bit and chuck a load of seeds in (pumpkin, sunflower, sesame - whatever you like). Serve immediately to rapturous applause.
Takes about 20 mins from start to finish.
Just had it for tea - total result. 😎

Put all of the dry bits in a bowl and add a decent splosh of olive oil:

Mix well, then stir in the water:

Keep mixing until it looks like this:

...then place on a well floured surface and knead for a few minutes:

If it gets too sticky, add more flour - too dry add more water. Little by little is the key though. Eventually it should look like this:

Roll into a sausage shape and break into balls about 35mm diameter (1.25" (ish) in old money). Roll these out flat on a floured surface and get them as thin as practically possible. I made 15 out of the dough described here.#

If the pan is really hot, the bread will start to fluff up a bit (in a few seconds so don't leave it too long!) Flip over and do the other side just the same.

Once cooked, place aside to cool and do the same to all of the others.

Eventually, they'll look like this:

Then spread whatever you like on them or use as a tortilla/naan bread and enjoy!

Yorkshire Puddings and Pancakes by womble_lancs

I love Yorkshire Puddings and have been known to eat more than 20 in one sitting... Yorkies are wonderful things. They're great with your main course, but they're also great for dessert too - with ice-cream or with golden syrup. Lovely!

What a lot of people don't seem to realise is that the mixture for Yorkies and pancakes is pretty much the same; it's just the method of cooking which is different. I can't understand people who buy the batter mixture in a packet because it really is simple and idiot-proof.

Yorkshire Puddings

Ingredients (makes about 10)

3 oz plain flour
3 fl oz water
2 fl. oz milk
1 egg
pinch of salt & pepper
beef dripping or lard (dripping is better) Never use cooking oil, it doesn't work.

Equipment

Cake tins like these
butter knife

Method

Preheat the oven to 220c/425f/gas mark 7
put about a level teaspoon of dripping or lard into each section of the cake tin and then put the tin in the oven to heat up whilst you make the mixture

Sieve the flour into a mixing bowl and add the salt & pepper
In a jug, or another bowl, beat the liquids and the egg together

Add the liquid to the flour and whisk together until there are no lumps left. I prefer to use an electric whisk for this, because I'm lazy but it's still easy with a
hand whisk.

By the time you've mixed it, the fat in the tin should be sizzling hot. Take the tin out of the oven and carefully pour a little of the mixture into each section of the tin and then put it back in the oven as quickly as you can.

Cook for 25 minutes and then check to see if they're done. If not, leave them in for another 5 minutes and then serve.

Pancakes

Ingredients (makes about 3)

3 oz plain flour
3 fl oz water
2 fl. oz milk
1 egg
butter

Equipment

Mixing bowl
Frying pan with sloping sides, not straight sides - it's very hard to toss a pancake in a pan with straight sides

Make up the mix as for the Yorkies, but don't add the seasoning.
Heat up the frying pan until it is very hot.
Add a large teaspoon of butter and let it melt and sizzle.
When it has stopped sizzling, pour in some of the mixture until it coats the base of the pan.
Leave it on the heat until the top of the pancake is no longer liquid. Pick up the pan and jiggle it until the pancake loosens from the base of the pan.
Then, toss the pancake and then return to the heat to cook the other side.

Tossing pancakes is easy too. The mistake that many people make is to try to throw the pancake upwards into the air. Don't! That's the easiest way of breaking it in half or sticking it to the ceiling/cooker hood. You need to make an narrow oval motion with the pan. Thrust the pan away from you and then pull it back sharply, giving it a little upwards movement as you pull it back. It will slide the pancake out of the pan and turn it at the same time. The pancake should not get more than it's own diameter in distance above the pan. Practice makes perfect

I like to serve pancakes with slice pears and cream, but they're also nice with just lemon and sugar. Savoury pancakes are nice too - try adding a little grated cheese to the mixture, or some fried onion & mushroom.

Gingernuts by Womble_Lancs

Ingredients

8 oz self-raising flour
2 heaped teaspoons ground ginger
2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
3 oz granulated sugar
4 oz butter or margarine
4 tablespoons golden syrup

Utensils

1 large mixing bowl, cooling rack, fish slice
2 greased baking trays (or trays covered with that wonderful

Preheat the oven to 190c/375f or gas mark 5
Sieve the flour, ginger and bicarb into a large bowl
add the sugar and mix well
add the butter and rub the mixture between the fingers until it has a crumbly texture, and there are no lumps of butter left.
add the syrup and mix it until it's a thick sticky dough

If you have a food processor it's even easier - use the dough blade, not the sharp blade.

Pinch off a lumps of dough about the size of chestnuts and roll them into balls. Place them onto the baking sheet and prod them down into circles. You need to leave quite a gap between them, because the spread out a fair bit. No more than 12 to a sheet.

Bake for about 12 minutes and remove from the oven. Leave them to cook on the baking sheet for at least five minutes before trying to transfer them to the cooling rack, otherwise they'll fall apart. Use the fish slice to remove them from the baking sheet.

Guide to Making Bread By Tim (Pioneer)

The history of bread making

Bread is one of the oldest processed food known to man. It has been one of our most important staple foods for over 5,000 years.

the bread we eat today is very different from the bread made by our Stone Age ancestors .

Stone age bread
The oldest record of bread-making is from over 5 thousand years ago by our Stone Age ancestors.
The flour was made by crushing grains of wild grass by hand between two stones,
one of which had a hollow in it.
The flour produced was then mixed with water to make dough and cooked over an open fire. The bread was coarse and very heavy in texture.

The first yeast used in bread making was by the ancient Egyptians.

if you have ever wondered where the saying,
I am so hungry I could eat the plate comes from.
it comes from Norman times when trenchers were made.
Trenchers were flat loaves made from soft french flour which also doubled up as a plate. So if you were really hungry you did eat your plate.

The term bakers dozen (13)
Came about because bread was sold by weight.
In olden times bakers/sellers would often go door to door or sell it on a stall
Anyone caught selling under weight bread were in danger of being lynched or if you were lucky put in the stocks.
So the bakers/sellers would carry an extra loaf they weighed it as they sold it,
then they could cut off an extra slice to make up any underweight loaves.

the term upper crust,
Comes from a time when bread was baked in old fashioned brick ovens fired by wood
Bread was often sliced across the loaf rather than down as of today.
Needless to say the rich could afford the top crust where the poor had to make do with the bottom which was often covered in ash baked into the loaf.

This guide is intended for people who have never made bread before.
Though the more experienced may pick up the odd tip or two

so how do you make bread.
The most basic raised bread can be made from just four items,
Flour, salt, yeast, and water, this is often called tin bread.

Recipe for tin bread

Lbs-oz (grams)
2-8 (1134) Strong flour (bread flour)
0-3/4 (21) salt
0-1-1/2 (43) yeast
1-8 (680) water (there's 20 oz's of water to a pint, so in this recipe you would use 1-1/4 pints of water)

makes 4x 1 lb loaves,
dough temperature = 80*f (the temp needed for optimum fermentation)
bft (bulk fermentation time) = 1 hour(total time from mixing to placing in the tin)
kb (knock back) = 45 minutes (the time you remove excess co2 from the dough)
bake at 470*f (243*c) for 30 minutes (approx)

how to determine the water temperature for a dough.
Find temperature required (this recipe 80*f (26*c)
Double this 80x2 = 160*f
Take away the flour temperature (e.g. 70*f)

This leaves the temperature you need the water at is 90*f

Hang on you may be saying to yourself,
My old gran's been baking bread for years and she never takes the temperature of the flour and water. And of course your right.
You can make quite good bread without all this extra work,

She knows by experience roughly what the water temperature should be by feel.
But this is a guide for people who have never made bread before so by following the dough temperature guide, not only is there very little to go wrong, you get a better loaf.

So lets get started.
First sieve dry ingredients onto a table.
Make a bay
Place the salt in the middle
If using fresh yeast break this down in the water (place in a couple oz's of water and mix till dissolved. (if using dried yeast follow instruction on the tin and use half of what the recipe says in this case you would use ¾ of an ounce.)
add the water and mixed in yeast and start to bring the whole lot together starting from the inside of the well leaving a wall of flour behind so that the water does not run out

at this stage if the recipe you're using requires any fat this would be the point you would add it)
develop the dough (mix) until its smooth and clear
this is done by pushing away hard with the heal of the hand then rolling it back with the fingers.

roll into a ball.

Cover dough with a damp cloth to prevent it from forming a skin by drying out.

Allow it to rest (the bulk fermentation time) after 45 minutes fold dough together to modify the gluten and to expel the surplus gas.

After bft scale the dough pieces at 1 lb (454 grams) mould up round then allow to recover for a minute or two then fold and roll like a Swiss roll and place into a lightly greased tin making sure the seam is underneath.

Cover with a damp cloth until its ½ an inch over the top of the tin. Make a small cut in the top.

Then place in the oven and bake.

To test if the bread is baked, lift it out of the tin
(it will be very hot so use protection)
turn it upside down and tap it.
When bread is baked it sounds hollow.

Bread should be removed from the tin immediately on withdrawal from the oven, otherwise it will sweat.

Beansprouts and Spring Rolls

by Bushbaby

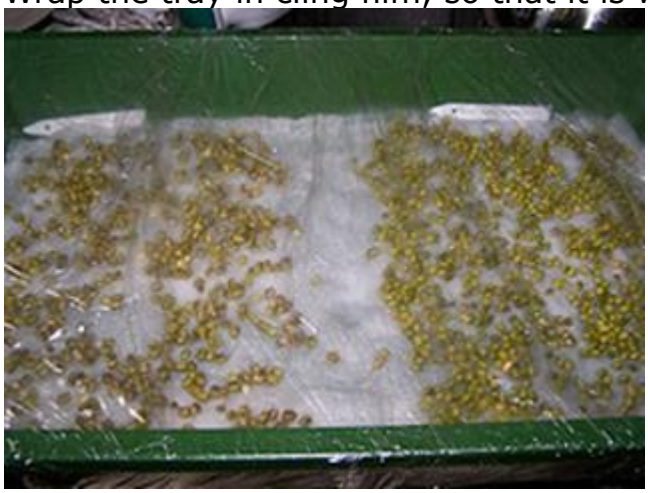
Out of frustration with the insipid bean sprouts you get in the supermarket, I decided to start growing my own again (used to do this years ago). I know bean sprouts are very cheap, but the beans are even cheaper and the taste of them fresh is superb.
You can buy packets of dried mung beans in most supermarkets normally 500g for around 80p to £1. Here I've only grown 100g to start with as a demonstration.

The first step is to give the beans a kick start by washing them and soaking overnight in water.

The next day, rinse again in cold water.

Lay the beans on damp kitchen roll or cotton wool in a tray

Wrap the tray in cling film, so that it is watertight



Cover the tray in brown paper so all light is excluded.

The tray need then to placed in a warm place for 6 – 9 days for the beans to sprout. I used the airing cupboard.

Separate the sprout from the beans. This does take some time and be prepared for an interesting smell when you peel the cling film back!
Rinse the sprouts well and the smell will disappear. The taste of the sprouts at this stage is lovely! If you want you can simply use them in salads at this stage.

I love spring rolls and Red has a soft spot for them too, so here are the other ingredients I use – carrots, mushroom, red pepper, ginger, and chilli - basically anything I find in the fridge!

Lightly stir fry all the ingredients with the bean sprouts to soften them up.

Add a small amount of the ingredients to a square of filo pastry or spring roll wrap. I tend to use filo pastry because it's easier to get hold of/make.

Wrap the pastry around the around the ingredients across a diagonal

Seal the final edge with a spot of water and lay aside

Deep fry each spring roll until golden brown – roughly about 20/30 seconds Deep fry each spring roll until golden brown – roughly about 20/30 seconds

Enjoy! Red did! They’re especially nice with a soy sauce dip.

Rabbit Curry by **Still Waters**

Ingredients

Rabbits
Olive oil
ground or fresh ginger
curry powder
salt
chillies or chillie powder
garlic or garlic powder
salt
pepper
flour
single cream
onion
peas

Take your rabbits and skin them (Presuming they have been paunched in the field)

Then cut the rabbit flesh into sizeable chunks

Give the meat a good glug of olive oil then add bish of salt and pepper and a bosh of chillie powder and work it into the meat.
leave the meat in the marinade over night for the best results.

Now take your olive oil, garlic powder, ginger powder, salt, chilli powder, paprika and flour and mix them in a bowl in your desired quantities until you achieve a paste consistency.

Next peel and chop an onion and get a handful of peas

Brown the meat in an oiled pan then add the onions and peas

Next add your curry paste and stir in adding water and single cream to achieve the desired consistency.

Now just simmer for half an hour.

Well here’s the finished curry

The meat was a little tough in places but all in all it was a lovely tasting meal and a lot than ordering take away.

Turkish Delight by **British Red**
Ingredients

You will need:

½ pint of water
1oz of Gelatine
1lb of granulated Sugar
¼ teaspoon of citric acid
1 tablespoon of rosewater
Pink food colour
A little icing sugar and cornflour

Pour your water into a cold pan and then sprinkle the gelatine over the surface of the water stirring gently.

Add the sugar and citric acid and put on a low heat until everything has dissolved.

Boil hard for 20 minutes then add the rosewater

Drip in colouring until you get a nice pink shade. I find my handy dandy cheap plastic eyedroppers come in handy here (as well as water purification, vinegar titration and all sorts of other stuff)

Leave the mixture to cool for 15 minutes and then pour into an oiled mould. As keen as I am on traditional tools, these silicone loaf tins and moulds they make these days are fantastic for turning out neat loaves, soaps, sweets and all sorts. Heatproof and you can just turn them inside out. Silly colours they come in though

Let the mixture cool in the mould for 24 hours. Sieve together a couple of tablespoons of cornflour with a couple of tablespoons of icing sugar. Leave most in a bowl but use a bit to carefully coat a cutting board

Using a sharp knife, cut into slices and then cubes. A good size is about ¾”.

Roll each cube in the icing sugar and cornflour. You should end up with about a pound and a half

Line some tins with greaseproof paper and fill with the cubes giving each layer a thick dusting of the sugar / cornflour mix.

A firm favourite of children, old ladies (and middle aged Bushcrafters). If you want to be posh they are "Rahat Lokoum". To me they will always remind me of my Gran.
Red

Whey Cake by Chris Breen

A tasty use for that Whey you have left over from Cheesemaking

500gr Self Raising Flour
300 gr Caster Sugar
2 Eggs
2 drops vanilla essence
Pinch Salt
400ml Whey
Dried Fruit

Preheat over to 160 degrees

Mix flour, sugar, vanilla and salt in bowl, make a well in centre and add whey, beat to make smooth batter.

In a separate bowl Wisk eggs until light and fluffy, then fold into batter. Add fruit to mix

Pour mixture into greased baking tray and cook for 1.5 hrs until golden brown.

Potato cakes by Dotty

Gosh I'm sloppy I haven't done a cook-along for eons Anyway as usual we're broke and the Bloke and Lad will be home soon...I've got some left over big soup from yesterday but felt like we needed a little extra...I've had a bit of old left over mash in the fridge (home grown potatoes I must proudly add)...Well we had bubble and squeak just the other day and I could have done 'cheesy topped and toasted' mash but then it came to me...I need a potato cake hot and dribbling with butter

So to make my potato cakes take your left over mash and add flour and baking powder (to be honest I don't know if you need the baking powder but it won't hurt) and I can't give you quantities because it depends how much mash you have

Mix the flour in with the mash...you'll need more flour than you think and you'll think I'm crazy and it will never turn into a dough but trust me keep kneading and adding flour and eventually you'll end up with this dough

Roll out to about 5mm thickness and cut to a desired shape...I'm feeling rectangular

Dry fry in a heavy bottomed pan (or under a hot grill)

Till they turn golden and a bit crispy on the outside...you can eat them now with lashings of butter but I'll reheat mine and serve them with dinner...oh

and they freeze well 🤩

Potato Cakes Variations by Jericho

Some more variations on the Spud!

Boxty

Boxty is a traditional Irish potato dish, celebrated in the rhyme.

Boxty on the griddle, boxty in the pan, If you can't make boxty, you'll never get your man

8 oz/ 250 g/ 1 cup raw potato
8 oz/ 250 g/ 1 cup mashed potato
8 oz/ 250 g/ 2 cups plain flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
large knob of butter, melted
about 1/4 pt/ 125 ml/ 1/2 cup milk

Grate the raw potatoes into a bowl. Turn out onto a cloth and wring, catching the liquid. This will separate into a clear fluid with starch at the bottom. Pour off the fluid and scrape out the starch and mix with the grated and mashed potatoes. Sieve the dry ingredients and mix in along with the melted butter. Add a little milk if necessary to make a pliable dough. Knead lightly on a floured surface. Divide into four and form large, flat cakes. Mark each into quarters but do not cut right through, and bake on a griddle or in a heavy pan.
If liked, more milk and an egg can be added to make a batter which can be fried in bacon fat like drop scones.

Champ

Champ is a simple warming dish which is cheap, easy to produce and very filling.

8 medium potatos, peeled
small bunch of scallions (spring onions)
1/4 pt/125ml/1/2 cup milk
salt and pepper
knob of butter per person
(serves four)

The best way to prepare the potatoes is to cook them in a steamer and then pass them through a food mill. Alternatively, boil until soft but not mushy, drain and return them to the heat to dry somewhat before

mashing. In any case keep hot. Chop the scallions finely, both green and white parts, and cook for 5 minutes in the milk. Beat this mixture into the mashed potatoes until smoooth and fluffy, season to taste and serve a large mound on each plate with a good knob of butter melting into the top. Each forkful is dipped into the melted butter as it is eaten. Very good with a glass of cold milk.
Colcannon is made in much the same way as champ, but with the addition of cabbage. In parts of the country white cabbage is always used. In any case, shred and chop a small cabbage (discard the stump) and cook until tender. Beat into the potato mixture and serve as above.

Potato Farl

Also known as potato cake or potato bread, this is very much a northern dish. It is an important - indeed essential - constituent of the Ulster Fry, alongside bacon, egg, sausage and perhaps fried soda farl.

The recipe calls for cooked, mashed potatoes. These should be freshly boiled, or, better still, steamed and passed through a food mill, and used warm.

2 lb/ 1 kg/ 2 cups mashed potatoes
4 oz/ 125 g/ 1 cup plain flour
2 tbsp butter
salt

Melt the butter and mix into the potatoes with the salt. Work in the flour quickly but thoroughly and knead lightly. Divide in two and roll out each half on a floured board to form a circle about the size of a large dinner plate. Cut in quarters (farls) and cook for about 3 minutes on each side in a heavy frying pan in a little bacon fat.
Potato Bread

Also known as fadge or potato cake, this is delicious hot from the griddle or pan with melted butter and a sprinkling of sugar. It is also a much-loved part of a traditional breakfast.

225g/ 8oz warm cooked potato
1/2 tsp salt
25g/ 1oz butter, melted
50g/ 2oz plain flour
Makes 8

Mash potatoes well. Add salt and butter, then work in enough flour to make

a pliable dough. Divide the dough in two and rolll out on a floured surface to form two circles 22cm / 9 inch in diameter and 1/2cm/ 1/4 inch in thickness. Cut each circle into quarters and bake on a hot griddle or pan for about 5 minutes or until browned on both sides. Some people like to grease the baking surface, while others prefer a light dusting of flour for a drier effect.

Pratie Oaten For a tasty, textured variation, substitute fine oatmeal for the flour in the recipe above.

Chapter 8 Food Storage

Suggested Foods to Store

by Ludlow Survivors Group

Carbs

Rice and Pasta

Rosti. Available from most large supermarkets. Comes in a foil pouch and lasts a couple of years. Basically grated potato and sometimes onion / bacon etc. Lasts a good couple of years with no refrigeration. Nice as part of the Sunday fry up anyway.

Instant Mash. Not great on its own but now available with onion of cheese. Okay for topping off tinned mince as a cottage pie, frying with tinned veg as bubble and squeak.

Savoury biscuits. I like the hovis ones but Ritz, or cream crackers etc. are fine. Can be combined with spreads of choice. Get the ones in metal tins if possible

Ground cornmeal (Tesco finest). Makes great Tortillas and lasts for years.

Packet tortillas and Naan bread lasts a few months - if you use them anyway, stock up.

Tinned new potatoes - boil em, fry em even mash or roast. Dirt cheap from Aldi or Lidl

Cracked roasted buckwheat – A tasty alternative to Rice, Potato and pasta, Long storage and fast to cook and very cheap. (you can also buy cook in the bag versions too)

Fruit & Veg

Dried onions and dried garlic are a must for me. They liven up the dullest meals. Dried onion steeped in hot water for a bit and fried makes tinned hot dogs good.

Dried Beans - kidney, haricot, butter - whatever you like - always good and last (literally) for years

Never forget the humble sun dried tomato but also dried chillies, mushrooms and all dried veg - again - lasts for years

Tinned beans - not just baked beans but also kidney beans, Haricots etc (good for chillis)

Tinned peas (mushy or ordinary - your choice). Dried peas last a long time too.

Lentils, pulses and chick peas - great for soups and stews. You can mixed packs of "soup mix".

Dried fruit is great - I love apricots and apple rings but go with what you like. Beware added sugar for day to day but thats fine for emergencies. Try health food shops. Dont forget brazil nuts etc. too.

Tinned fruit such as peaches, pears and fruit salad can be eaten cold. Pie fillings are nice hot with custard

Christmas puddings last a good 2 years and can be steamed easily on a fire

Tinned puddings (Heinz do some nice ones like spotted dick and stick toffee) last for ages and are nice for a cold day

Eazy Fried Onions. These are Spanish onions peeled and lightly fried in olive oil

Meat / Protein

Corned beef (combine with mash and dried onion for hash)

Hot dog sausages. Nice to eat anyway. wrap in tinfoil and a couple of sheets of the Telegraph. Burn the newspaper. Hot meal!

Bacon Grill - slice thin and grill or fry - a great standby. Goes well with Rosti.

Lidl do tinned peanuts. 2 year shelf life - great stuff - nice for a snack day to day as well (also Cashews etc.)

Tinned fish are great especially tuna and sardines, but don't overlook kippers, tinned crab etc. if you like and will eat them

Fats

Lidl do a dairylea type cheese triangle jobby that does not need refrigeration. Lasts 2 years. Nice beaten into mashed spuds etc. or spread on ritz crackers etc.

Peanut butter is a great source of fat and nice on biscuits. combine with chilli for a satay sauce

Dried milk (Marvel, 5 pints etc.). Useful for home baking and as a standby.

UHT Milk - don't like it and bulky but a couple of bottles are handy.

Keep a couple of spare bottles of olive oil. Useful as a butter substitute for bread making etc. and all the normal uses

Instant custard – what's not to like?

Cheese spread in tubes (various flavours inc salmon)– Available from Polish shops that are springing up everywhere in the UK

Butter substitute – Pura Buttery light touch, (cant spread this, but) wonderful buttery taste, 75% less saturated fat than butter, drizzle this on everything like new potatoes, scrambled eggs etc for that extra yummy taste. Good for frying with as well as for flavouring. Available at almost every supermarket. Approx £0.85p for 420ml (Asda)

Fish oil – How many times have you purchased prawns somewhere to find they were for some reason lacking that taste of fresh prawns? Or frozen ones that just seem to loose their taste altogether? When defrosted add a little fish oil to them and it seems to rejuvenate that taste back. Also add to fish stews and other recipes. Available in most supermarkets. Around £0.69 to £1.20 depending where bought and type.

Sundries

Don't forget spices - chilli, curry powder etc. can make a bland meal nice

Dried egg. Goes well will Rosti and Bacon Grill. Try Weigh and Save but they have to order it. Larger Tescos sometimes.

Honey. Sugar substitute that NEVER goes off (they found some in the pyramids that was edible).

Baking Powder. Useful for making bannock etc. as a bread replacement (the guys have eaten my bannock - it also makes great pancakes too)

Flour - plain white and strong bread flour. Do you have baking facilities? If so add some yeast.

Salt and pepper - a large jar of each cost pennies and is useful in bread

making (salt) and livening bland food (pepper).

Sauces - a spare bottle of your favourite (tomato, brown, mayo etc.)

Jams and spreads last for ages (years) and are handy on biscuits, puddings, bannock etc.

MARMITE!!!!

Also go for curry sauce, pasta sauce - all the ready made jar stuff - will liven up bland ingredients

Also, have some spare Bisto. Don't overlook packet and jar sauce powders - white sauce, onion , parsley even chip shop curry will cheer up basic carbs and make em palatable

Beverages - tea, coffee, fruit tea, squash, isotonic powder etc.

Ready Meals
Always handy stuff for a long day anyway. Here is a few to consider

Beans and Sausage / Full Monty etc.

Tinned Soups (especially "Big Soups"). Packet soups are handy too and only need hot water

Tinned Chilli and Curry

Ravioli and Spag Bol in tins

Fray Bentos Pies and meat puddings in tins can be cooked in an improvised oven or some can be steamed / boiled

I really am going to have to get round to writing that database to store all our info in at some point

Vacuum Storage by British Red

Mylar is a trade name for a membrane that is impermeable to moisture and oxygen. It is heat sealable. If you iron it closed you create an atmospherically sealed environment. Add oxygen and moisture absorbers (for what's already in the bag) & you vacuum seal food away from air, wet etc. Whole grains and rice should last a decade plus. The bag is vulnerable to puncture and rodents though. Seal a bag (20"x30") up in a 5 gallon or tub to protect it and you have a fantastic sealed food store! Instead of a tub use the canoe barrels from Smiths of Dean that are airtight and waterproof and you have one heck of a robust food store.

Here's how to do it

1. Line a 30 litre barrel with your 20"x30" mylar bag

2. Chuck in a moisture absorber (desiccant)

3. Pack the bag as tightly as possible. The best way is loose rice or grain. But thats a lot to use when you open it! Individual bags (even smaller mylar 10"x8" bags) can be packed inside - just add more O2 absorbers as there is more air space.

4. Fill to within 2" of the barrel rim

5. Seal both sides of the bag. Open your packet of Oxygen absorbers and drop the right number in (5 300ml ones for loose grain - 10 for bags). Seal any extras in a tight airtight jar straight away. Its best to use up your O2 absorbers all on the same day.

6. Chuck a note in the top of the barrel listing the contents. In this barrel is 12kg rice, spice, dried veg, mashed potato, dried beans etc. The bag is silver like a rat pack. How are you going to know whats in it when you have done several?

7. Seal up the barrel tight - good for a LONG time.

Now, that may seem dear. But ask yourself - is it really? 4kg own brand long grain rice from Asda is less than £2.

A barrel will hold 5 of 4kg bags (loose 20kg). Say £10. Add £10 for the (re-usable) barrel or scrounge 5 gallon tubs for free from your local bakery etc. Mylar, desiccants and O2 absorbers are around £5. So, somewhere between £15 to £25 for 40 pounds of rice good for 10 years. or...50p a pound.

Here is the problem though. There is no pre-made Mylar or desiccants or O2 absorbers to be had in the UK. You have to pay to import from the US. No real problem.

Canned Butter by British Red

Well, here in the UK you cant get tinned butter – at all. Ghee and clarified butter is around tinned at a huge price but not proper butter. Well, time to do it myself!

I decided to do a test can of 2lbs (1kg) of butter.

I believed this would need about two pints of jar space – I decided to use two of the wide / low "Le Parfait" sprung sealable preserve jars and a couple of small jam jars in case my measurements were wrong. Mason Jars, Kilner Jars or any other airtight preserve jar should work fine

These need to be sterilised and heated. Warm the oven to 120C (250F), remove the seals and anything likely to melt and put the jars in (I tend to stand them in a baking tray for easy removal). Leave them in for 20 minutes. If you do the rest of this procedure right and start now on the butter, they should be done at the right time.
Now for the butter. I have heard that you should not used churned, oil added or "spreadable" butters for this, so I stuck to 4 half pound slabs of hard English butter.

You will need a large wide pan, a wooden stirring spatula and some way of transferring hot butter into the jars. I used a ladle here, but for small jars a jam / canning funnel would be a big help.

Put all the butter into the pan and set the pan to a low heat – you want it to melt, not burn

As the butter melts, keep moving the slabs and stirring the melted butter. As it melts, the butter separates into clarified butter and solids. The solids will sink to the bottom and burn if you don’t stir regularly.

When the butter has all melted, you need to simmer it gently for about five minutes. Keep stirring – it will separate again if you don't.

After your butter has simmered for five minutes, your cans should be done. Remove the butter from the heat and take the cans from the oven. The cans will be HOT – I use a pair of metal tongs to handle them – its easier than oven gloves. Then don your oven gloves (I have a pair of knitted heat proof gloves that come in handy here) and re-fit the seals to the jars.

By now your butter will have separated again. Give it a good stir. Use your ladle (and funnel if needed) and transfer the butter into your jars. Leave about ¾” of head space so the jars can be shaken as they cool.

Seal up your jars. You can see here that the butter will separate again quickly. As the butter cools you need to keep shaking to keep it mixed.

Shake every ten minutes until the jars are only faintly warm to the touch. Then move the jars to the fridge. Shake every 5 minutes as the final rapid cooling takes place. When they finally set, the butter will look as it did originally, but is sealed in an airtight container.

I’m told that the same effect can be achieved with hard margarine if that is your preference. These jars will be stored in a cool dark pantry - fortunately its easy to tell if butter has gone rancid. I'll test the small one after the summer and the larger ones over time to check longevity.

Red

Making Fruit Leathers by British Red

I've done tutorials on drying fruit, making jerky and drying herbs in a dehydrator before. Some fruits don't lend themselves to drying too well – rhubarb (goes stringy), gooseberries (thick skin) and raspberries (turn to mush). They can be dried though – as a fruit leather. These are those strange stretchy frit things that kids love (winders etc.). This tutorial will show how to make them. Before you start, line the trays of your dehydrator unless you have specialist "leather" trays. The fruit will drip through the mesh of open trays. I use microwaveable cling film but aluminium foil would work I should think. Make sure you make holes where all the air vents should be.

Step 1 – gather your fruit.
For each "tray" of my dehydrator I need about a litre (quart) of fruit – clearly for something like rhubarb this needs to be chopped. So step one is a wander round the veg patch and see what's in surplus

Rhubarb

Raspberry

Gooseberry

Step 2 – Prepare the fruit

It’s a good idea to was all the gathered fruit as the low temperatures we will use may not kill any nasties. Ultimately we will be putting all the fruit through a blender but we need to get it soft if it isn’t already. A wash will suffice for the raspberries but the rhubarb needs to be chopped into ½” slices

And the goosegogs “topped and tailed”

Step 3 – soften if necessary

The harder fruits need to be softened before pureeing. The raspberries need nothing but the gooseberries and rhubarb need to be put into a pan with a TINY amount of water (less than a quarter cup) and heated gently

just until they are soft

One softened if necessary put your fruit into a blender. If you don't have a blender you can crush the fruit with a fork in a mixing bowl. I add two tablespoons of honey to each litre of fruit – I find this helps in bind into a good leather. Others use apple with soft fruit since the pectin helps the leather set – either is good.

Step 4 – puree

If you have a blender, slap the lid on and give the fruit a good "whiz up". If not, use a fork back against the side of the bowl. You are going for porridge like consistency here

After this, if you want to remove seeds and pips, push the puree through a sieve with the back of a spoon. I like the seeds in so I don't bother but its up to you

Step 5 – load dehydrator

Don't forget to ensure you have prepared your dehydrator trays with a covering if they are the mesh type.

Using a palette knife or spoon, spread you puree evenly over the trays. Aim to go no more than ¼" thick or you'll be drying the stuff till the next ice age

Don't get the puree too near the air holes as it will spread a bit and you

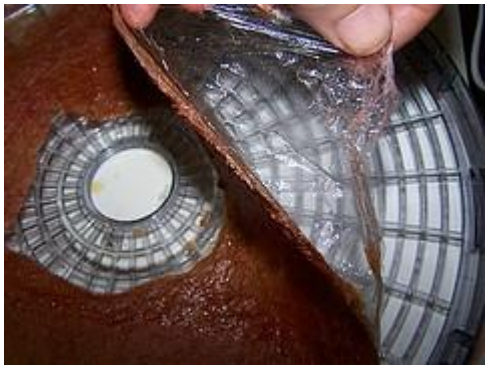
don’t want it dripping through the holes

Step 6 – Dehydrate

Turn on your dehydrator (you can do this on baking sheets in a very cool oven if you prefer). I find this will take 7-10 hours to dry out so leave plenty of time

Keep going till you have a stiff but bendy sheet of leather. It will be about a third of the original height

Peel the leather carefully off the backing sheet



Step 7 prepare rolls

Cut your fruit leather into strips (I use scissors) and roll each strip up for convenient storage

Step 8 cool and store

I leave the rolls to cool on a plate in the fridge for 24 hours – I find storing them warm leads to condensation

After 24 hours I put mine in a plastic tub and keep in the fridge (not really necessary). I shove a mixed handful in a ziplock for day walks or take the whole tub as trail snacks and deserts for longer trips. You can of course add water and turn them back into a sort of pie filling or hot desert. Red

Make your own Jerky

by British Red

Well, BB very kindly bought us a dehydrator recently inspired by a number of links to the very reasonable products around at the £25 to £30 mark. We really wanted one to preserve surplus garden produce (chillies etc.) prior to getting an Aga back on out next move (the cool ovens in Agas are great fro drying!).

Anyway, we've dried some herbs and so forth but I had a hankering for some jerky and I thought I'd do a few photos of the process since a few people are interested.

I decided to do some measurements to calculate amounts I can process at a time, so started of with 500g of lean beef.

This is a nice lean cut, but fats can make dried meats go rancid so I trimmed of any larger fatty areas.

Next step is to slice it thinly. I like to slice across the "grain" of the meat since it makes it much easier to eat when cut that way. I keep the strips about 5mm thick at the most – you get a lot it seems as you are cutting.

This is the grain of the meat (left to right)

These are the strips – you get a LOT

Next step is to marinade the meat – this tenderises the meat and adds flavour. I like mine spicy!

I put all the strips into a Ziploc bag and added Tabasco, Soy, Worcester sauce, barbecue spice and chilli flakes

I then gently rolled and massaged the meat to drive the flavour in

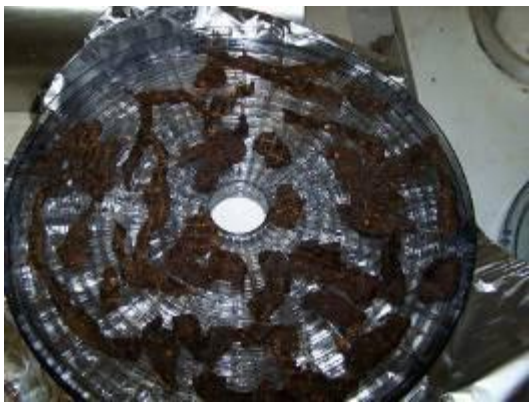
Finally the bag was left in the fridge overnight to soak up all the flavours

Next morning, BB lined the bottom of the dehydrator with tin foil in case of drips. The meat neatly covered one tray of the dehydrator. So that's helpful – I have 5 trays on my dehydrator so I know now I can process 2.5kg of meat at a time (more if I slice more thickly, but then it wouldn't be my favourite!)

Here's how it looks after 30 minutes. You can see already how it's shrinking and all the surface liquid has gone

After 2 hours. I was checking regularly to know when it was right. This was still soft and “squishy” to the touch. I like it just bendy but hard and fully dry

After 7 hours we had it done. Here’s the finished article. Amazing how much it reduces in size.



In fact I weighed it. There was 150g – or just under a third of the original

weight.

Well that’s it – you don’t need a dehydrator to do this – its just that its set up for lower temperatures and blows air through. The house smells great! You could achieve this in a cool electric oven by hanging the meat on toothpicks through the bars or spreading it on wire trays. A cool Aga oven or solar dehydrator work really well too.

Oh - its at least as good as oven jerky too - I feel a 5lb batch coming on ;)

Red

Pictorial - Making Vinegar from Scratch by British Red

My quest here was to produce high quality vinegar that was "re-producible" from only the things I could find in my garden and a few items of basic household materials.

My fist step was to make something to produce some vinegar from. We all know that vinegar is known as "white wine vinegar", "cider vinegar" etc. This is because the best vinegars are produce from fermented material.

Now I do happen to grow my own grapes, but that felt like cheating, so I gathered my windfall apples and chopped them finely.

Next I sort of cheated – since I have access to a fruit press that looks like this

Had I not had one though, I would have rigged a press using a car jack,

frame and tray – or even squeezed juice using over ripe apples and a potato masher and then sieved out the pulp.

However I have a fruit press so I load in the chopped apple and squeezed out the juice

The juice was put into several 3 pint preserving jars. It quickly separates into juice, pulp and "froth".

I skimmed off the "froth" and covered with a loose cloth. This is because, due to the naturally present yeast, the apple juice will ferment. If I sealed the lid, the pressure would build and ultimately explode. A loose cloth allows the CO2 produced during fermentation to escape but keeps any nasties out.

Within a couple of days a new froth builds up from the fermenting yeast

Once the fermentation has finished, I removed the cloth cover and left the open jar in front of an open window for a couple of days. You do this outdoors but try to prevent spills and rubbish falling in the jar.

Within one day I had success – the fly I hate the most – the tiny vinegar fly had fallen in my cider

Why do I hate it? It’s the reason I need to be super careful when brewing – have a look at the cider one day later

The “film” you can see spreading from the fly is aceto bacteria. This bacteria turns the alcohol (or fruit juice) into vinegar. The jar now contains “mother of vinegar”. This is rather like “sourdough starter”. A small amount introduced into another jar of wine, cider or fruit juice will “infect” the liquid and cause it to turn to vinegar.

There are a couple of “buts” in this process however. The aceto bacteria needs air. Do not cover it (other than with a breathable cloth). When introducing it into a new jar, lift a little of the “scum” with a spoon and “float it” onto the surface. Mixing it will deprive it of air and kill it. Lastly, the “mother” needs food to live. You can “feed it” by running some fresh cider down the side of the jar into the mother once a month. Down the side so as not to “swamp” the bacteria floating on the surface.

So, once we have used out fruit juice to transform a few jars or buckets of cider into good cider vinegar, can we use it? Well not really. Shop bought vinegar is about 5% acid. Home made can be 10% or even more. This is unpalatable to say the least. So it should be diluted. I generally first run it through a coffee filter to remove the bacterial “sludge”, although a siphon tube works and indeed it can be left – it’s not harmful. However the question remains – how much to dilute it to maintain a good taste and efficacy. One can work from taste but there is a scientific method. We will use a form of titration to measure the relative acidity.

First we need a red cabbage! Roughly chop half a cabbage and boil in a couple of cups of water until the water turns deep purple

Strain the water off through a colander to create a jug of dark purple “cabbage water”

Take two tablespoons of cabbage water and stir them into a glass of water

Next dissolve two tablespoons of bicarbonate of soda in a glass of water (if you didn’t have any bicarb, a lye solution would work)

Next find some “known strength” vinegar. This can be a commercial vinegar or an old batch of yours whose strength is right. Using a pipette / eye dropper, add 10 drops of the vinegar to the dilute cabbage water and stir with a plastic spoon.

As you can see from this "before and after" shot – the colour is distinctly different when acid is added.

Next add 20 drops of your bicarb solution. The colour will switch back to blue – I have shown the glass with bicarb added on the right. Stir with a plastic spoon again.

Keep this glass safe as you will use it to compare against. It’s called the control.

Take another glass and fill it with water and two tablespoons of cabbage water. Add seven drops of your home made vinegar. Then put it next to the control. Add bicarb solution one drop at a time stirring all the time. Count the drops. When the colours matched stop.

The number of drops of bicarb you added, divided by 4 is the percentage acid in your vinegar. Mine was 37 – so about 9% acid. Dilute with water until you get 5% acid and pour the vinegar into clean bottles. Cork and label the bottles. All the cabbage, bicarb and coloured vinegar should be thrown away. Its not dangerous but it doesn’t taste nice!

So, there we are. No need to buy fancy expensive vinegars – just make your own

Hope that was interesting

Red

Bottled Pears in Brandy

by British Red

This is one of my favourite recipes for a little luxury over winter. You will need

2 ½ cups of granulated sugar
½ pint of water
2lbs of pears peeled and cored (about 8 pears)
4 bay leaves
½ pint of brandy

The first step is to peel each pear, then cut it into quarters and cut out the core, pith and seeds.

Next put the sugar and water in a heavy pan and bring to the boil. Simmer the syrup for 10 minutes until it thickens and then put the pears into the syrup.

Turn the heat right down and poach the pears until tender – I find 20 minutes is about right but it depends on ripeness and size, 1 minute before the end add the bay leaves.

Take the pan from the heat and let it cool for 5 minutes. Us a slotted to spoon to lift out the pears and pack them carefully into jars.

Put the sugar syrup back on the heat (take out the bay leaves first) and boil vigorously for 5 minutes to thicken the syrup.

Take the syrup off the heat and let it cool for 5 minutes. Then pour in the brandy stirring well. Its important to let the syrup cool first a little or all the alcohol will evaporate.

Pour the brandy syrup into the jars ensuring the fruits are covered. Seal the jars well.

There is often some brandy syrup left over. Please dispose of this carefully since its sweet and delicious but not suitable for children. My personal method of disposal involves ice cream and a spoon.

For reference the alcohol really does help the preservation, however in leaner times, fruit can be bottled perfectly well in either plain syrup or fruit juice.

Adventures with Dried Egg

by British Red

As a man renowned for patience, I waited almost ....minutes...before opening the first !

Then came the cooking. Suffice it to say, that I chuffed it up big time on the first two attempts (and I cook, with dried stuff, a LOT). So, having sussed it out, here is my guide to how to make a good scrambled egg, using the spray dried stuff.

Take a measure - doesn't matter what - and fill it with firmed up dried egg.

You need to blend the same volume of water in. If you just dump the water in, you have stuffed it. Add a little at a time. First blend to the consistency of thick paste

Keep adding water and blending hard with the back of a spoon until you get something as thick and smooth as pancake batter

Now go for a forage...

I found some Welsh onion

and some sorrel

...neither was a surprise...they were in my herb garden 😃

I added them to my egg mix with some black pepper

Then I lit the stove and put a little oil in my pan

Put the egg mix in the pan - fry and stir

Plate up and sprinkle with a little smoke paprika

How did it taste? Well, had it turned up in a cafe on a bit of toast, I would have been happy 😀However, had the first two attempts turned up.....

As always, practice is the key!

I can't fault the ingredients. Will honoured his commitment - at a cost to his own pocket. He delivered a top end product that we can all use with a little effort.

This is really something that should be in every our pantry. It lasts a year in original packaging. More if mylared.
Red

US Army Ration Packs

by Terry

There aren't many people on the prepping scene who haven't got a few ration packs of some description stashed away "just in case".

I am not a fan of British Army Ration Packs so normally buy American Army "Meals Ready to Eat" (MRE's) to take camping and keep in the BOB. I do this purely as they keep for a long time, contain everything they need in one tough, waterproof and compact package (which also floats) and have a lot of calories. You can make your own for equivalent prices but I like the "throw it in and forget about it" philosophy about them.

MRE's vary in content but each one should provide around 1,200 Calories, they also have an average shelf life of three years but can normally be safely eaten some time after this point. US Command recommend that MRE's be eaten in the field for a maximum of 21 days - this is because the meals are light on fibre and so will bung you up (constipation), they are also heavy in fat and salt (sodium) so not recommended if you are not very active.

All of the above means that you cannot hope to survive long term solely on any type of ration packs, quite apart from the financial expense your body needs more natural food - as a short term quick fix they are hard to beat.

What we have here is meal (menu) number 14 from the series – as you can see it is a Vegetarian option.

Here it is next to a household electric kettle for size comparison.

To open pull apart the flaps at the top of the pouch, these are tough but re-sealable so you can close it again if you wish.

Here are the contents of this MRE pouch.

Top row from left to right

An accessory/condiments pack (salt, Tabasco sauce, toilet paper, chewing gum ,moist towelette, water resistant matches, Iced Tea beverage powder),

A main meal of Vegetable Manicotti,

A flameless ration heater

Packet of dried shelled peanuts.

Bottom Row from left to right

Eating spoon
Wheat Crackers
Peanut butter spread
A Spice Pound Cake dessert
Potato sticks (crisps)

To prepare – first things first, open the cardboard package and take out the main meal.

Take the flameless heater and read the instructions on the side, I've never had a problem but these things can explode if you misuse them. As the name hints, it will heat up the main meal without a flame!

Once you've read the instructions then tear the top off where the arrows and notches correspond.

Pour some water into the bag - up to the indicated line

Insert the ration main meal pouch

Fold the top flap of the heater pouch back on itself and wait about a minute so you can hear and feel the heater element activating with the water.

Once you have some heat and sizzling noises then push the whole thing into the cardboard box that main meal pouch came from – being more careful than me to not spill any water!

Carefully prop the whole package up against something, the original instructions say "rock or something" so I picked the something!

The heating of the meal depends on ambient temperature and sea level elevation; it’s usually around 15 minutes.

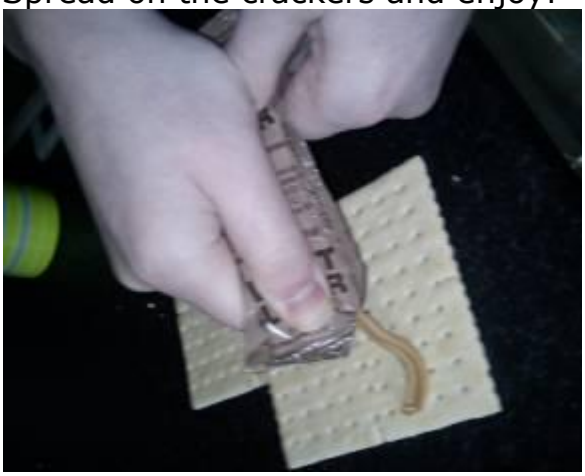
Whilst waiting you can make a start on the entree which in this case is the Wheat Crackers and peanut butter.

Tear apart the cracker package

They are usually in one piece due to them being vacuum packed in Mylar

Tear off the corner of the spread

Spread on the crackers and enjoy!



I was quite peckish and decided to eat the snack components as I still had another 12 minutes to go for the main meal. I opened up the potato sticks:

They didn’t taste too good it has to be said, whether it is a cultural thing or they’d gone off I don’t know – in the bin they went!

On to the “dried, shelled peanuts” and I tore the packet open!

Look a bit like what we would call “dry roasted peanuts” in any British Pub – tasted good too!

Main meal nearly ready so time to rip open the spoon packet!

It’s not what I’d call an ideal “racing spoon” but its good enough for this job and worth keeping hold of afterwards for other jobs!

Time is up so carefully pull the flameless ration heater out of the cardboard box.

Then pull the main meal pouch out from the ration heater pouch.

Give it a good kneading for a minute to spread the heat around.

Then find the notch at the top

and tear open

Insert spoon and eat

It doesn’t look like much but will keep you warm and tastes great after a big hike.

When you have finished eating the main meal throw all of its packaging back into the cardboard box with the ration heater – do NOT wash or drink the water that comes out of the flameless ration heater!

Main meal finished – it’s time for dessert, the Spice Pound Cake!

Find the notch and (what else!) tear it open!

Here it is with the moisture absorber the packet also contains (the white and blue square), don't eat that bit!

I think that the US Army desserts are the best thing about the whole MRE.

A final word about the condiments package

The Tabasco tastes great and go's into the main meal, if the MRE is old though it can be viscous or even evaporated completely - the salt can go into the main meal as well if you like or be drank (with the Iced Tea Drink Mix) if you feel you need it.

The chewing gum is for after the whole meal and aids in cleaning your teeth, the toilet paper for obvious purposes and the matches are water resistant so worth hanging onto for fire lighting etc.

A note - The moist towelette is for cleaning your hands PRIOR to eating, as you can see there is a lot of tearing open and use of hands for this meal – you need to be doing this with clean fingers!!

There is a lot of packaging with this type of meal, very little of it is biodegradable. The main MRE pouch can be reused again for other purposes but please ensure that you take your rubbish and dispose of it correctly.

Each country's armed forces have different ration types, the biggest difference between the US Army and British Army ration packs is that the former is only one meal and the latter is all of your meals for 24 hours.

Apart from the weight, size and expense of them it's all a matter of content and of course personal taste.

Here's a website I find useful for MRE information:

http://www.mreinfo.com/us/mre/buying-mres.html

Hope this helps!

Ter

British Army Ration Packs by Chris Breen

Thought these should have a mention as the American counterparts have been.

The British version consists of a Breakfast, Main meal, Desert, Snacks, drinks and sundries.

There are minor modification for those deployed in very cold or very hot climates but the basic pack is the same.

Typical contents follow the same format with variations in Breakfast, Main Meal, desert etc the pack illustrated includes;

Breakfast (Sausage and Beans)
Main Meal (Meatballs & Pasta)
Desert (Custard Sponge Pudding)

4 Packets Tea
2 Packets Coffee,
4 10g Packets Sugar
1x 60 G Drinking chocolate.

1 x 35g Instant soup (Lentil & Vegetable)
6 x Beverage whitener
1 x 35g Lucozade Energy Powder

Oatmeal block
2 x 60gr Yorkie
Pack of Brown Biscuits
Pack of Fruit Biscuits
Ham & Beef Paste
Chewing Gum
Pack boiled Sweets
Berry Combo Fruit Grains
Small bottle Tobasco
15gr Vegemite tube

Tissues, paper pack
10 x Waterproof matches and striker
6 x Water purification tablet.

No fancy self heating bag in the British ration pack. Most items can be eat hot or cold. Recommended cooking is to snip corner off meal pack then

place in mess tin or crusader cup full of water and boil. Using hexamine or green fuel stove.

Once cooked use boiling water to rehydrate soup or use to make a brew.

Chapter 9 Alcohol

Guide to Blackcurrant Wine

By British Red

In case its useful to Marie or indeed anyone else ..though this would be useful...its a piece on how to make wild wine I did for an outdoor forum. Probably old news to many of you, but I hope someone finds some useful info

Day 1 - 17/07/06

A workmate gave me a large bucket of blackcurrants today - heres what I got

They are fantastically ripe and plump - great for wine, but they won't last too long, so first job tonight will be to sort them out and get them going

In wine making terms the "must" is the mushed up grapes or whatever we are going to make wine out of. It’s the first stage in our process.

To prepare the must, I will need a couple of large buckets. Everything I use is either food grade white plastic of glass. Don't be tempted to use dustbins etc. - the colour and other nasties can leach out and spoil the wine.

I weighed the bucket of blackcurrants and found I have about seven pounds in weight. I need about 3lbs of fruit for each gallon of wine so i'll make two gallons (12 bottles). I'll need for the first part a brewing container at least twice that volume. I have some 5 gallon beer brewing containers, so I'll use one of those.

First thing is to sterilise everything I use - one bit of nasty will ruin the whole batch. There are proprietary sterilisers, or you can use baby bottle sterilising fluid. I use a cup of plain unscented bleach in 5 gallons of water. I'll leave that in the brewing container for half an hour and wash it out well (twice) before using it

Next stage is to pick over the black currants and remove any bad ones, stalks, leaves etc. - I ended up with a bit over 6lbs of fruit so I weigh out 6 lbs and eat the rest. They should look like this

I put all those berries into a large, sterilised fine mesh straining bag that looked like this

We tie up the top of the bag with plain white cooking string

Now if we were dealing with grapes, that would be our main ingredients sorted. But we aren't. Grapes are high in tannin (that gives the wine bite), various natural products that yeast lives on and sugar. Grapes are also high in acid.

For each fruit you need to adjust the recipe for whats needed. In this case, we will add 6lbs of sugar. Blackcurrants are high in tannin so none is neded (if it was we could add grape tannin from a home brew shop or a cup of strong tea or a couple of oak leaves).

Blackcurrants are also high in acid (which the mix needs to be for the yeast to work). If we needed to increase acidity, we could add brewers acid blend or orange juice. We do need to add some nutrients for the yeast to live on - thats a matter for brewers yeast nutrient or chopped apple.

Now we crush up the berries using our hands or a sterilised potato masher (inside the bag).

Next we add 6 pints of boiling water and make sure the sugar all dissolves

Now another 10 pints of cold water to bring the temperature down

Finally we are going to kill off any wild yeast present (which can ferment oddly and leave a funny taste). To do this we will add a crushed Campden tablet (available from brew shops). We'll then leave it for 24 hours. You can skip this stage if you want - it just minimises the risk of a bad brew.

24 hours have now passed.

The liquid is really changing colour now and all the wild yeasts have been killed out. There is one more optional step to do before we start this stuff fermenting and that is to remove pectin. Pectin is a natural ingredient of many fruits - it’s the stuff that makes jam set. It also makes your wine cloudy and a bit of a pain to clear.

To get rid of it we'll add a teaspoon of a natural enzyme call pectolase. We'll give that 24 hours to remove all the pectin and then we'll start a yeast culture and get fermenting!

Heres how our wine is looking today

It smells quite a bit stronger today and quite "woody" - that will change over time though - going a nice colour though huh?

Day 3 - 19/07/06

Well, we've prepared a must, removed any wild yeast and pectin that may make our wine cloudy. Time to get fermenting. Now we could slug about 5g (a teaspoon full) of any old yeast into the must and hope for the best. But we're going to do this properly.

So to do get fermenting we need a "starter culture". That in effect is some living yeast that is already converting sugar to alcohol and CO2. We'll make that by adding some dried wine yeast to an organic sugar bearing liquid. That's easy – we'll put a cup of orange juice in a large glass. Its important to let it come up to room temperature before adding the yeast (cold is the enemy of yeast).

Once that's happened we'll take a sachet of fresh wine yeast and add it to the OJ.

In an emergency you can use any yeast but proper wine yeast is best. It imparts a better flavour (there are a variety of types that work slightly differently) and it sinks. Bread yeast floats. Your yeast will not only consume sugar and produce as outputs alcohol and CO2, it will also reproduce. A lot. This in effect makes a sludge. A sludge at the bottom of your barrel is easy – just siphon off the nice clear liquid from on top. Floating sludge (or worse yet suspended sludge) is the brewers enemy. So proper wine yeast it is. We empty the wine yeast in and mix well to produce a cloudy liquid. Now we leave it for anything up to a couple of hours. You will see why in a bit.

We could go and get a brew on now (for our colonial cousins, getting a brew on is nothing to do with wine or beer – its what we really call making a cup of tea). However we are going to be really fancy with this wine, so I'm going to show you a few useful bits of kit.

From the top there are the following

1) a hydrometer,
2) a measuring jar
3)a "wine thief".

All complicated stuff right? Wrong! Lets re-play what's here

1) a weight on a stick
2) a jar
3) a big old turkey baster

A hydrometer sinks a different amount into different "thicknesses" of liquid. It has a scale on. Water reads 1000 on that scale. As you dissolve sugar in the water it becomes "thicker" and the hydrometer sinks less and reads a higher number. Using this you can measure the amount of sugar. What is great is that alcohol is not as "thick" as water. So as your must

ferments, you can tell how much sugar has fermented into alcohol. By measuring the specific gravity (thickness) at the start and end, you can work out how much alcohol is in your wine and when fermentation has finished. Clever huh? So we use our wine thief to suck up some must. This prevents grubby hands and gunk contaminating our must. When we move into narrow necked fermenting vessels later its just plain easier too.

We squirt that liquid into the measuring jar, lower the hydrometer in and read off the specific gravity. In this case its 1101. We'll write that down cos we'll need it in a few weeks. What we have now done is measured exactly how much sugar is in the mix – the total of the fruit sugars already present and the sugar we added.

We pour the must back in the fermenting vessel.

Now we get a brew on. It's a warm day so we'll check our starter culture in half an hour….

Look at it now

The froth is carbon dioxide bubbles caused by the yeast fermenting the sugar. See how much there is? Our wine will do that too. If we did the first stage of fermenting in a demi-john, the wine would froth up all over the place! So we do the initial (primary) fermentation in a large vessel (bucket)

with a big gap in the top (headspace). When its all calmed down, we will use galss containers with small headspace and an airlock. More of that later, but if you remember when we sized the primary fermenting vessel, we went for one at least twice as big as the volume of liquid – now you know why.

So, we have measured our original gravity and we have a starter culture – lets pour the starter culture in and give it a mix.

Now, you can skip all that stuff and just bung your yeast in – its up to you – leave out the fancy stuff if you want

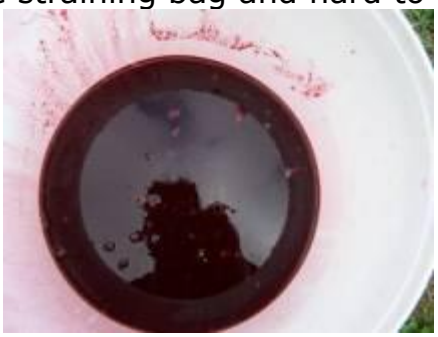
Finally, we need a lid. Partly to keep our must clean, but also to keep out vinegar flies. These nasty little brutes are attracted to fermenting liquids and they fall into it. Vinegar flies carry bacteria that will turn your wine into vinegar (hence the name). Now we could put a hard lid on. Trouble is as the gas (CO_2) builds up, it will blow the lid off. In secondary fermentation, we will use an airlock, but in primary fermentation too much gas is sometimes produced for the airlock to cope with. So we fit a close fitting lide that has tiny holes melted in with a red hot needle (too fine for a vinegar fly to pass through).

More when the initial violent fizzing stops!

Day 7 - 23/07/06

Well, the first violent fizzing is slowing down so its time to pop our must into the large bottles we'll finish off the fermentation in (demijohns). So, we put sterilising solution into 2 demijohns and leave them to sterlise. Then we rinse them twice. If you haven't seen the icon of home brew – this is a demijohn

The first think is to get rid of the fruit in the straining bag. Warning – blackcurrant stains to all get out. So, we carry the whole primary fermenter out to the compost heap. We remove the lid, lift out the bag and let it drip. Don't squeeze (squeezing forces the mush through the mesh of the straining bag and hard to get rid of).



This is what the must now looks like. You'll see some little clumps of material – this is a combination of yeast and tiny blackcurrant particles –

we'll get rid of them in a bit. The little ripples are CO2 rising up

So, lid back on and we carry the primary fermenter back in and set it up on the kitchen counter. Now we'll see a good reason for using a beer brewing vessel – it has a tap on the bottom. We fit a bit of plastic pipe on the tap (run in under the hot tap first to soften it). This rig mates getting the must into the demijohns much easier.

Now, to strain out any large bits, we'll put a nylon tea strainer into a funnel. We then fill the demijohns through this set up

Now, I'll introduce you to a few more bits of High tech kit J. On the left we have an air lock, on the right a rubber bung sized to fit the neck of the demijohn. It has a whole through it the size of the stem of the airlock. You can make an airlock out of a bit of plastic tube bent into an "S" shape if

you don’t have one. In fact the whole demijohn, cork, airlock arrangement can be lashed up out of an old 5 litre water carrier and 6” of plastic tube.

We put enough water into 1/3 fill the airlock – it should look like this

We firmly press the bung into the neck of the demijohn. It should look like this

Fairly quickly the CO_2 will force its way up the stem of the airlock. As it passes the bottom of the curve (see photo) a bubble of CO_2 will rise through the water and, with the pressure relieved, the water drops back to

the bottom. The pressure builds again and so on. When the bubbling stops – fermentation is complete.

Finally I rig a light proof jacket up for both demijohns out of brown paper. They are going to sit on my windowsill for a few weeks now and I don't want the light to bleach that lovely dark colour out.

This secondary fermentation takes about a month. Can be more or less dependent on temperature. As it slows down, we will siphon the wine into a fresh demijohn leaving any sludge behind (racking off). Once the fermentation stops, we will clear the wine, stablise it (to stop any further fermentation) and sweeten if we want to. We'll then put it through a wine filter for a final polish, cork it into sterilised bottles, label and seal it.

Day 11 - 27/07/06

Just checked the wine before heading for the hills for a few days - its got to a lovely steady bubbling now - lots of tiny bubbles rising looking like this

There's a bubble coming round the airlock every two to three seconds. Did you know if your airlock is bubbling it proves you have a good bung seal? If you didn't the water wouldn't move despite the visible bubbles in the wine. When the bubbles slow to one every 30 seconds, we'll "rack off" into a clean demijohn (leaving the sediment behind) and again when fermentation stops (we'll use something to settle out all the sediment)

The sediment really is building now - its mostly the breeding yeast. Remember I said proper wine yeast sinks and that makes it easier to clear? Here is a picture that shows it settling out on its own.

Anyway, its all proceeding as it should so its back on with the paper jacket and time to finish packing for my trip

12/08/06 - Day 25

Well, I bet you had forgotten about this thread J. Well, the wine has now virtually stopped bubbling (less than one bubble every 30 seconds. Its also started to clear itself beautifully – look at this sediment layer.

So, time to see if its ready and "fermented out" (this means all the sugar has turned to alcohol). To do this we will remove a bit of wine from the demijohn and check the specific gravity. This is where our "wine thief"

comes in really handy. If we were to tip the demijohn, we would shake up all that sediment. So we take a bit of wine from the neck of the demijohn like this

And we read off the new specific gravity – looks like about 992 to me – what do you think.

Now, if you have been following this thread, a couple of things should strike you as odd here. The first is, we started with an SG of 1100. Okay, you know that the sugar has been turned to alcohol and CO2 so that it's not very strange that its changed. But what is quite strange is its now lower than the SG of water (1,000). That's because alcohol has a lower SG than water. In fact we can work out how much alcohol we have – there's a formula that goes

Original Gravity – Final Gravity / 7.36 = % Alcohol by Volume ABV)

In this case that's 110 – 992 / 7.36 = 14.7% alcohol. That's plenty strong enough.

Right time to get rid of that sediment. This is a process called "racking off" – in effect siphoning good liquid without disturbing too much sediment. For this purpose we use a wine makers siphon.

A wine makers siphon is a piece of clear plastic tube. In one end is a tap. In the other a stiff clear plastic tube that is sealed at the end. Half an inch above the sealed end two small holes are drilled. The stiff tube is lowered into the wine that is to be siphoned off. Because the end is sealed, it doesn't suck up the sediment, but liquid from the two side holes half an inch above the sediment.

If you done have a wine makers siphon, lower a piece of tube into the demijohn and then put a clothes peg on the tube just above the neck of the demijohn. This stops the tube dropping in and touching the sediment.

Now, put the full demijohn on the kitchen counter and a clean, sterilised demijohn on the floor. Suck on the tap end of the demijohn to draw up some wine and then place the tap into the clean demijohn. The wine will flow down the tube into the clean demijohn without disturbing (much) of the sediment.

My next job was to taste the wine. Reckon its nice? Nope. Blackcurrants are sour at the best of times. All the sugar we put in has turned to alcohol along with most of the fruit sugar. So, we are going to need to sweeten the wine some. But if we add sugar, we may well start it fermenting again. So we need to stabilise the wine (kill the yeast). To do this we will add some potassium sorbate.

Now, if you don't want to do this, just add some sugar syrup. Yeast can't live much above 14% ABV (at least this type can't). So it'll be okay after a bit more bubbling. I just like to be sure.

Now, I only need 1g of potassium sorbate per gallon (demijohn). I would often use my reloading scales for this, but many wine makers don't have them, so here is a way using kitchen scales.

First, weight out 5g of potassium sorbate (kitchen scales are okay for this)

Add 50ml of water to the 5 g of sorbate. It should dissolve instantly and be faintly yellow in colour.

Now we have 50ml containg 5g. So 10ml contains 1g. 1 teaspoon is 5ml. Two teaspoons per demijohn will be just fine.

That will take 24 hours to work – then we'll adjust the wine taste – I'm going for a very boozy, slightly sweeter finish on this – a bit like port. So, we put the airlocks back in for now.

13/08/06 - Day 26

Ding dong the wicked yeast is dead!

Sorry, bit of a "Wizard of Oz" moment there

Right, our wine has been racked off and the yeast is dead. We know its "sharp" because all the sugar has been fermented. But we have stopped any further fermentation by stabilising the must. So now we go to work on the flavour. We are going to use two materials here. Sugar syrup and Glycerin. Sugar syrup reduces "sharpness" from the mixture and Glycerin removes acidity, thinness and "bite". I can't describe their effects, you will find out other than imagine a sour chilli then a sweet chilli – that's the effect of adding sugar. Now remove the chilli. That's adding Glycerin.

The most important tool of all here will be a glass. We'll pour a tiny amount of wine from the demijohn into the glass. We'll taste it – if its too sour we'll add a spoonful of sugar syrup, if too sharp, a spoonful of glycerin. We can add more if its not enough – we can't take it out if we overdo it so a tiny amount at a time and patience is called for here.

So Glycerin – here it is – buy it from you local chemist / pharmacy / drugstore.

Sugar syrup we need to make. Measurements don't matter here. Chuck a load of sugar in a jug – no more than quarter full.

Boil a kettle. We are trying to add just enough water to dissolve all the sugar. Its less than you might think. So add a tiny amount.

Stir hard with a spoon. Is the liquid still cloudy? Have we got granules sticking to the spoon like this?

If we have it needs a tiny bit more water – when we have added enough water it will go like this

Now we add a spoon of glycerin (if the must takes a little sharp)

Now here is the important bit. You are adding no more than 5ml at a time – or 1 in 1,000 of 5 litres that we are working with. Don't get impatient. 2 spoons of Glycerin is usually enough. But alternate Glycerin with sugar syrup and taste EVERY time. After each additional spoonful we cork and shake the demijohn. This serves two purposes – firstly it mixes the must, secondly it helps any dissolved Co2 leave the must. Dissolved

CO2 impedes clearing so this is very important. You will probably need more sugar syrup than Glycerin. That's fine. I'm not going to publish measurements – it's a taste thing. Blackcurrants are quite sour – this needed a fair bit of syrup to replace the natural fruit sugars.

Remember to taste after every spoonful – its like watching a set of scales tip, you get a sense of when the taste is nearly right –then suddenly it is – don't add more!

Now we have a great tasting wine – but its still cloudy! Lets get a clear, shining wine now. To do this, we will use a two step process – Fining then Filtering. Fining means clearing settling yeast and fruit particles out from the wine and filtering "polishes" the final liquid.

The finings we will use are a two part process – the first part "clumps" the yeast together – the second settles these clumps. There are many natural products that can do this – egg white (albumen), isinglass etc. Lets just call them A (clumping) and B (settling)

We add 5 ml of the clumping agent to each demijohn. We'll then leave the demijohns for 24 hours and add 5ml of the settling agent, shaking the demijohn well between additions.. After this, with 7 days or so, we'll be ready to rack off for a second time and filter.

So, more in a week or so, Well, the finings have worked – the wine is beautifully clear.

However if you look closely there is a distinct layer of sediment at the bottom of the demijohn. So we will use the siphon to “rack off” the wine into a clean, sterilised demijohn.

Now to be honest, we could just bottle that wine. But I want a really crystal clear professional finish. So we will use a wine filter.

The filter consists of a piece of siphon tube with a squeeze valve, a frame (the red base, a disposable filter pad (the white thing), a support mesh (the black thing) and a screw tensioner (the red circular arrangement on top of the support mesh and filter pad). It is assembled as shown and then filled with water to soak and swell the fibres of the filter. Think of it as a very fine, very efficient coffee filter. A white base fits on the filter (its upside down in this photo) to guide the wine into another clean, sterile demijohn. When assembled it looks like this

If you look at the filter, you will see a ling pipe bringing wine down from a raised demijohn (just like racking off). There is also a shorter pipe used for bleeding off any trapped air.

Right, we now have clean, fined and filtered wine. We pour it into clean (yes and sterilised) bottles with a funnel. We need to cork it. Its possible to put corks in with a mallet. I use a corking gun and waxed corks that do not need to be soaked, plain corks do

A cork is loaded into the channel shown below.

The gun is placed on the neck of the wine bottle and the cork gently eased into the neck a couple of mils

Finally the arms are pulled into the horizontal position driving the cork smoothly into the neck of the bottle

Now we could bung a label on (which should always say they type of wine and when it was bottled). I suggest you cross-reference to a book of recipes and notes so that when you get a cracking wine you can recreate it. We are going to add a little something to the presentation of the wine by putting a foil cap over the neck. First we drop a foil cap (available for a couple of pence from a wine shop) over the bottle neck.

Holding the cap in place we lower the bottle into a vigorously boiling pan of water. Your Billy is ideal for this – its tall enough to submerge the bottle

We keep the bottle submerged for 3 or 4 seconds

Finally we gently remove the bottle checking that the cap has shrunk firmly to the neck (if not – pop it back in)

Finally all the steam is wiped from the bottles, they are given a polish and labelled

Oddly, I always end up with a not quite full bottle that needs to be disposed of. Best I check it for clarity – Cheers!

Well that’s it guys – 63 images, 40 days and 12 bottles of wine – I hope you enjoyed it

Its the right time of year to have a go at your own wild wines - you can use any fruit you wish and all that varied slightly is the recipes for the must. There’s lots of good ones on this forum, plenty of great books around too. If you struggle, drop me a note and I'll send you a recipe.

Blackberry Brandy –

Full Pictorial by British Red

Okay, this is an old recipe. Very much in the style of "medicinal purposes" (seriously - it used to be used by the spoonful to ward of colds etc.). Very simple but a lovely comforting drink.

First pick your blackberries. Nice ripe plump ones. Discard those that are too "squishy" to pick cleanly or too hard to come away without the stalk. If no-one ever taught you, the right way to pick a blackberry is to hold it between thumb and forefinger and turn it to 90 degrees from the stem - not to pull it straight off. As a small aside, I picked up a great bit of foraging kit recently from a supermarket - a lidded 2 gallon bit of imitation Tupperware with a hinged lid and a shopping basket handle perfect for blackberrying!

So get your blackberries home. You will need one pound of blackberries per full sized bottle of brandy. I always end up picking lots but hey, what’s not to like about blackberry and apple crumble with any extras?

Weight your blackberries out. I have a set of balance scales (old fashioned bloke that I am). So I put a glass bowl on the pan side and balance it out with metric weights (I have both) on the weight side. I then add a pound weight to the weight side and keep putting blackberries in the bowl until I have a pound in the bowl

I then wash off the blackberries by emptying the bowl into a colander and running them under the tap

I put each pound of washed blackberries into a large jam pan and add half a pound of sugar per pound of blackberries

When you have weighed out as many pounds of blackberries as you wish to make bottles of brandy, put a low heat on under your jam pan. Don't go in with a high heat or you will burn the sugar. You want the juices to start to flow from the berries and make a lot of liquid before increasing the heat a bit to ensure all the sugar is dissolved. After a bit of gentle stewing your berries should look like this.

Now, its important to let your blackberries and sugar cool down before going any further. You could just remove the pan from the heat, but I tend to cool in glass bowls. Effectively you have a sort of runny jam at this stage. It's worth remembering though that hot jam is VERY hot. If you add brandy to it now, all the alcohol will evaporate

Now, you need to mix in one 75cl bottle of brandy for each pound of blackberries. mix well with a metal spoon (blackberries stain wood something awful). Whatever you use needs to be able to be sealed. I use tightly lidded white food grade plastic buckets but, for a small batch a glass bowl covered in cling film is fine

Put a lid on and leave for five days or so for the brandy to take on all the flavours of the blackberries. Alcohol will evaporate so a good seal is important here. You could use a demijohn and airlock if you like.

I'll post the rest when mine is ready - I should get about 6 full sized bottles from this as the juice adds to the amount of liquid. For those of you planning to buy brandy, just get a reasonable cheap brandy - the blackberry flavour will overwhelm best Armagnac!

Okay, we now have to deal with a large bucket of highly alcoholic runny blackberry jam. That’s my kind of problem .

First thing is to get rid of the big berries. Don't try to use a fine mesh to begin with - it just clogs. Something like a colander is fine.

It helps to move the fruit around gently with a metal spoon. Don't push it through the holes though. You will end up with a colander full of booze soaked blackberries

The blackberries must be carefully disposed of since they are very boozy and will stain anything they touch. Mt preferred method is a bowl of icecream and a spoon :o A look in the pan shows we still have "bits"

Time for a finer filter - a fine metal sieve this time

This will get all the pips etc. but leave a bit of fruit pulp. Next step is some fine cloth (muslin, jam bag etc.). Feel free to skip this step.

Have a try at this point and see what you think. If its still too "jammy", bung in a demijohn

Throw in some pectic enzyme (this is available from brew shops and dissolve the "sticky" element of jam. You can then completely clear the brandy using wine finings. Neither of these steps are needed or traditional - they can give a very posh result if you intend this for gifts etc.

The pectic enzyme takes about 3 days to work, then the finings another 3, so use a bung or airlock in your demijohn. Don't worry if you haven't got a demijohn, use an old 5l water container or similar.

When you have the brandy as clear as you want it, taste it. It will have a very strong blackberry flavour. It might even be too strong - if so dilute (with more brandy not water) until you arrive at the flavour you prefer. When your brandy has cleared, use a siphon (bit of tubing) to decant it off from any sediment then dilute with brandy as required

Select some attractive bottles – I like these old stone ones – they remind me of the "smugglers roots" of this drink. When you have filled the bottle cork tightly. I use a corking machine but a wooden mallet works fine

Make sure the cork is pushed right in if you want to use the next fancy step

A good dollop of sealing wax. This ensures the bottle is not "tampered with" ;)

When you have sealed the bottles, add a label – I've made up some leather ones I like the look of. Strangely theres always a little left over – I'd use a glass to dispose of it!

Skaal! Red

Sloe Gin by Souter

Here's how I make my own sloe gin.

First catch your sloe.

I'm lucky enough to work outside in the field (in this case literally), so when I spotted a whole hedgerow of sloe bushes it was too good an opportunity to miss. (Later on when I was doing the historical research I found out that this field was known as "Sloe Copse", so they'd been around a while). Pick them when you see them, I left it overnight and when I got back in the morning most of the sloes and even some rose-hips I'd spotted had been picked. Luckily they must have been a bunch of hobbits since all the sloes more than 5 foot 6 inches above the ground had been left. You'll need about a third of a carrier bags worth.

To make the sloe gin you will need:

1 lb (448 grams) of sloes
3 to 4 ozs (84 to 112 grams) of sugar
1 1/2 pints of gin (857 cl)
(All measurements can be varied to match what you've got, they're not written in stone)
A glass container twice the volume of the gin

A clean funnel
A large needle (I mount mine in a cork to make it easier to handle)

Now comes the boring part, wash your sloes and then using the needle prick them so the gin can permeate inside them (My brother in law puts the sloes into the freezer so the sides split when the ice crystals form, take your pick) and place them in the glass container. This needs to be big enough to take the volume of the gin and the sloes and sugar, twice the volume of the gin is a good ballpark figure. Weigh out the sugar and add to the sloes.

Add the gin

Put the cork in and give it all a good shake.

You'll need to shake it every couple of days for 3 weeks and then leave it for 2 months before straining off the sloes and bottling. Should be ready in time for Christmas.

It is better to be ready years too soon than to be one day too late: Robert

Drink Up Your (Pear) Cider by Souter

Not quite a necessity for survival but home brewed alcohol can be a boon on those long cold (nuclear) winter nights.

Brother in Law likes his weekly tipple of farm cider, buys in straight from the brewer whose family have been making it from generations. Recently he's become interested in making his own. Results last year were…."unimpressive" so Hartlands cider in Tirley still have a customer ! Anyhow his thoughts have recently turned to perry (or pear cider*).
*(Legally perry can only been called perry if its been made with pear varieties recognised as perry pears, otherwise you have to call it pear cider)

Luckily we have a neglected orchard nearby which was planted with perry pear trees back between the wars. A quick word with the tenant and it was help yourselves. Its been a good year for pears with the trees heaving

Note these are old fashioned standard trees (30 foot plus) so you could graze animals under them. It would be hard to cram any more pears onto them.

Peery pears differ from eating pears being harder, smaller and sharper

Perry pears on left, eating (Conference) pear on right.

An hour or so later we ended up for 2 barrows full (note different varieties)

Next job is to pulp (break up) or scrat the pears (I'm still sore from kicking myself that I didn't buy the hand operated scratter that I saw at the 3 counties flea market earlier in the year, food quality nylon teeth and all), anyway necessity is the mother of invention. Hugh Fearlessly Eatsall used a garden shredder in his series "Escape to River Cottage" and if it's good enough for him……..

Problem was that the hole in the top wasn't big enough to drop the pears through (designed to 1> stop buyers trying to cut up foot diameter tree branches and 2> stick their hand in I suppose), luckily it was only held on by 3 one way screws, which you can unscrew using pliers, revealing a couple of huge blades

(use common sense here don't stick your hands or any other part of your

body in there when its plugged in).
Now comes the messy bit start chucking the pears in, we blended the pears by chucking both types in at the same time.

Result is a bucket full of shredded pears

Now the hard work starts, getting the juice out of the pulp.

Start packing the pulp in, if you keep packing it down you can get almost a bucketful into the press

Put the follower on and add the packing pieces

Then its keep winding until the pips squeak

You'll get about 7 pints of juice from a bucketful of pulp. The drawback of type of press is that you have to dismantle it to get the pressed pulp out, if you're lucky it'll shoot out of the barrel in a big lump

The change in the pulp is huge from having the juice literally running out of it when you're collecting it in the bucket, the residue has only a slight damp feeling, like stuff that's just come out of a spin drier.
Finally pour the liquor into a brewing vessel and leave to do its own thing.

1 barrow load of pears filled a 4 and a half gallon container

Will keep you informed when its ready to drink

Elderberry Port Recipe

by British Red

This is my adaption, of jojobeans recollection of Mrs Ls recipe (or maybe someone else's) for ...elderberry port!

Ingredients:
For each demijohn (6 bottle batch) you will need

2lb elderberries
1lb Oranges
7 pints water
1/4 oz wine yeast
3lb sugar

Note - I am making a double batch - which requires some pretty hefty pan sizes!

Strip the berries from the stalks by combing them off with a fork and weigh out the required quantity

Rinse the berries off. I bought one of these large "Over sink" collanders a few years back - very handy!

Peel a couple of large oranges per batch

Stick your water on to heat now. You'll want a big pan - for a double batch a large stock pot is needed

Whilst the water is heating, rough chop your oranges

Then take a glass of room temperature orange juices and add a teaspoon of wine yeast. Stir well and leave. It will go frothy which proves the yeast is activated

Weight out your sugar

Dissolve sugar in minimum necessary boiling water stirring constantly

By now your water should be boiling

Add the elderberries and chopped orange

Simmer for 10 minutes and leave to cool

Your yeast starter should now be frothy like this

Pour the starter into clean, sterilised demijohns along with the sugar solution.

Whilst your "must" is cooling, sterilise another large pan or food grade bucket and set a colander up above it. I do this outdoors because this stuff will stain!

Using a jug, pass the cool pust through the colander to remove the large fruit bits.

Now set up a funnel with a double layer of muslin over it.

Filter the must into the demijohn(s).

Bung in an airlock. The first fermentation will be violent so leave plenty of "headspace". Top up when things are calm.

When fermentation is complete, rack off and bottle. Leave for six months.

Red

Mead by MadPanda

First off I want to thank British Red for helping me out with what to get, how to do it and answering my many questions. I am sure he has been waiting for me to let him know my results.

This is my first time brewing anything and it's one of my goals this year to at least make, mead, birch sap wine and sloe gin. So this is the first of the three on the go.

I will kind of give this as a tutorial/run through of what I did.

First of all the main thing is to sterilise the Demi-john. I got this one from a mate and it was pretty well soiled, so I first cleaned it with water and soap and that got rid of most of it. Then next I found a techniques used for cleaning using vinegar and rice and a lot of "shoogling" around. This apparently helps clean it. The third step to do is to sanitise the demi-john. On the label of the powder it recommended 12-24 hours for a well soiled bottle. So seeing as this bottle was left in a shed for many moons and was sitting in dirty water when we found it I thought I would play it safe.

Right after sterilising the main demi-john over night it was time to get the rest of the kit out and sterilised properly before use.

The equipment used is as follows:
- Air Lock

- 2x 1 Gallon Demi John one use for the primary fermentation and the second for the racking
- Rubber bungs, bored and solid
- Young’s Super Wine Yeast Compound
- Yeast Nutrient
- Pectolaze - Not used (Yet)
- Citric Acid Granuales
- Not forgetting the main ingredient of course! Honey!

Basically I added one teaspoon of the sanitiser to some warm water in the large pan, then I placed placed the bits and bobs in and waited ten mins or so. Pulled out the tub and glass for preparation of the yeast.

For the yeast mix I used 1 teaspoon of Yeast, 3 Made using Young’s super wine yeast compound, yeast nutrient and a glass of room temp orange juice. I mixed these together and gave it all a stir and covered loosely with cling film and went away for half an hour

....which tunred out to be a couple of hours as nothing appeared to be happening. Until.....

Now to prepare the must (mix of honey and water). I managed to find a large pan in a charity shop which would be ideal for mead, plus anything else such as jams.

I turned on the heat and waited til the water was a little bit warm, added three and a bit of the pots of honey to two parts water and stirred it a bit.

Whilst stirring I removed the surface stuff which apparently can have impurities and beeswax. I continued to heat for 10-15mins.

I left the whole thing to cool down a bit before adding to the demi-john. I didn't spill a single drop when transferring it

Added 1 teaspoon of Campden Powder

Added water to top it up, followed by letting it cool down a little. Then adding a teaspoon of tanin, 2 teaspoons of citric acid. gave it a shake and left it to cool down a bit more.

The final step was to pitch the yeast into the must. I am not sure if it was too warm when I added the yeast, it was still warm to touch, but a nice cool warm. So I hope I haven't messed it up.

When I did this a dark band seemed to have formed in the centre of the demi-john. Is that normal.

Finally bunged it up with an airlock and put away in a dark cupboard in the utility room. I will have a look over the next day or so and see if bubbles start to come out the air lock.

Requires several rackings i.e. Siphoning off too clean demijohn leaving sediment behind.

Enjoy,